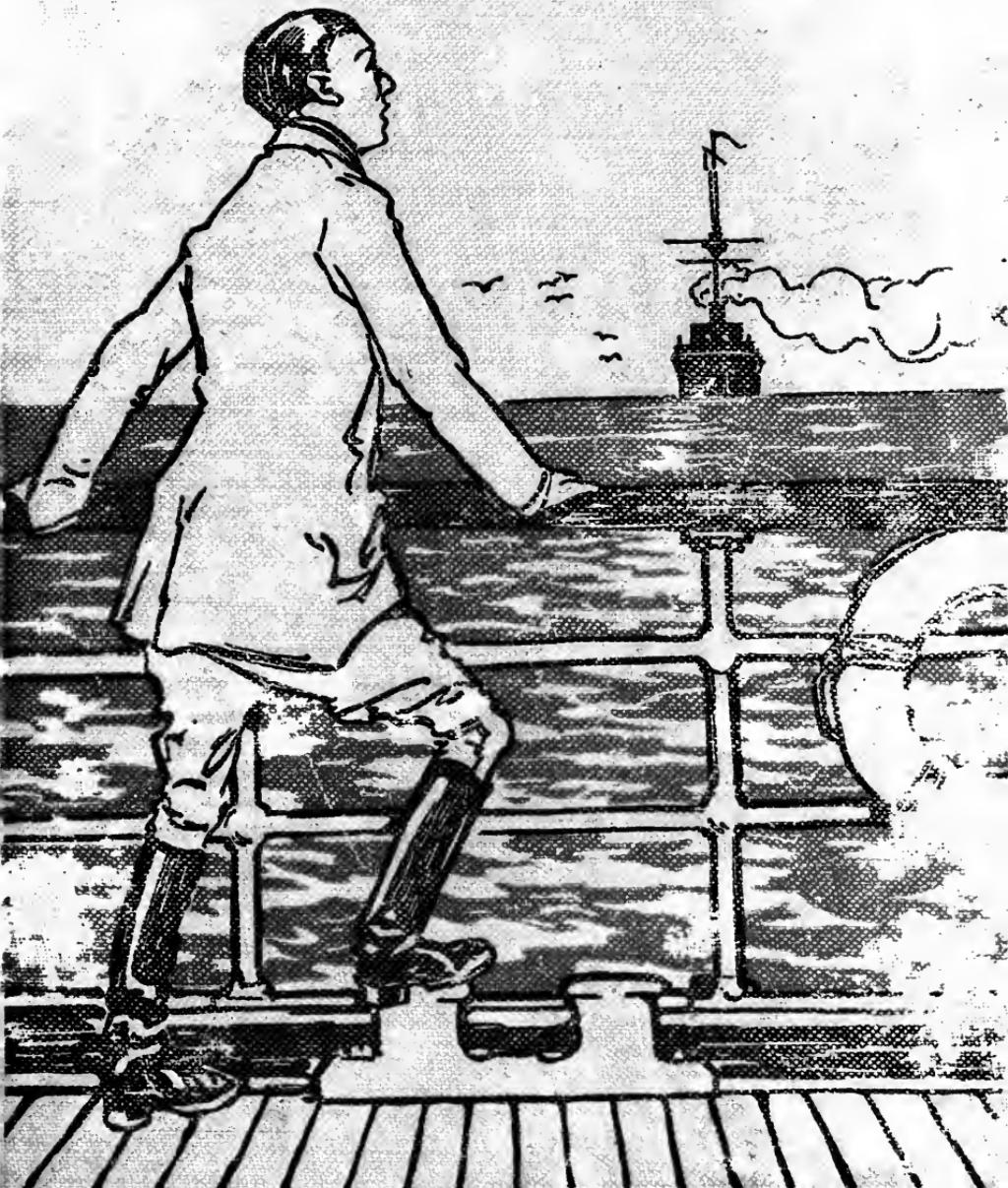


# The Gun-Runners





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Francis. T. Byron.

Kilkenny College.

Kilkenny

Dec 9<sup>th</sup>, 1916



# THE GUN-RUNNERS







(1,890)

He turned the full fury of his baleful green eyes  
on his helpless captive.

# THE GUN-RUNNERS

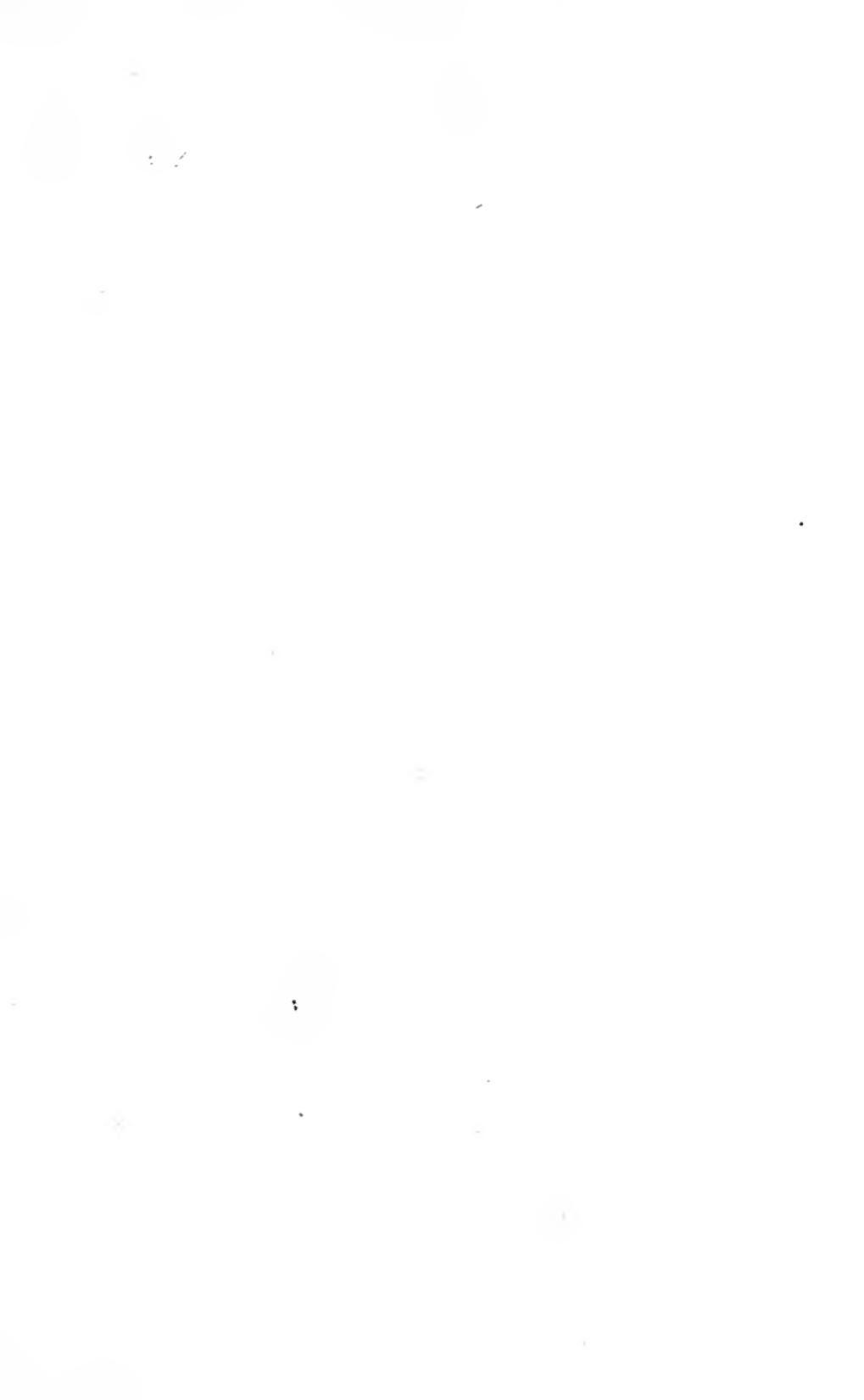
BY

W. DINGWALL FORDYCE

AUTHOR OF "THE JEWELLED LIZARD"

THOMAS NELSON AND SONS, LTD.

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# THE GUN-RUNNERS.

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## CHAPTER I.

### COLLEGE *v.* ACADEMY.

"COME on, Strover. I thought you weren't going to turn up, and we were just about to begin without you."

Cecil Brinscombe, the speaker, and captain of Felton College football Fifteen, had called a council of war to decide the composition of the team in the all-important match next day against Marsden Academy. For this purpose the members of the Fifteen already in the proud position of owning caps had been cited to attend, and now that Strover had put in an appearance, the number—ten in all—was complete. Brinscombe was a tall, sturdily-built fellow of over seventeen, and this was his third and last season in the Fifteen. Playing centre three-quarter, he was the mainstay of

the team, being “heady” in all he did, and as safe as a house. Perhaps a trifle slow in attack, he made up for this by the excellent understanding he displayed with his “wing” and particular chum, Percy Alden, and it was mainly owing to his cute movements in drawing the defence that the latter was given so many opportunities of displaying his great speed.

For some years previously football at Felton College had sunk to a low level; but by dint of constant coaching and hard training, Brinscombe had succeeded in getting together a capital team, which had become famous for its exhibitions of sparkling, up-to-date back play. The College had gone through the present season without losing a match, and it was the captain’s great ambition to keep this record unblemished. The last and stiffest match was against Marsden Academy, who were also unbeaten, and who came with a great reputation, having scored 153 points against their opponents’ 76. The object of the present meeting was to select the five best men for the remaining five places in the team, and Brinscombe opened the deliberations with a characteristic speech—short, and to the point.

“Now, then,” he began, thrusting his hands

into his trousers pockets, and resting a foot on the bench beside him, "you fellows know what we have to do. There are five caps still to be given, and the men who play to-morrow will probably get them. We need our very best team to beat the Academy, and although I can 'cap' any one I think good enough, I want to have your opinion on my selections, because there is difficulty about one at least of the places. My choice is Morrison back, Dobson at half, and Tramm, Rendal, and Kindersley forwards."

"There can be no two opinions about Morrison," remarked Spooner, the leading forward, as his captain reseated himself. "He's a rattling good back—the best I can remember at Felton."

The rest enthusiastically endorsed this opinion; Morrison was accordingly given his place, and after some discussion the three forwards were chosen. There was a pause; then after a few moments' hesitation Spooner once more rose to speak.

"A captain is entitled to choose his own team," he remarked, "and Dobson is a real good half; but after his display last Saturday I would be inclined to give the place to De

Souza. You asked our opinion, Brinscombe, and I give mine frankly for what it is worth. Personally, I find a small, nippy half more difficult to get down on, and De Souza is as slippery as an eel. Otherwise I have no fault to find with Dobson."

"I agree with Spooner," said Strover laconically, and from the "hear, hears" that followed it was evident that De Souza had strong support.

Before any one else could offer an opinion the captain rose again.

"I quite understand Spooner's views," he said; "but I have preferred Dobson for three reasons. First, he is stronger, and can stand up better to the heavy Marsden scrummagers; secondly, he has been tried in a losing game forward, while De Souza has not; and third—well, I'm not sure that 'Suzie' has grit enough for such a game. However, I want to know what you all think before we decide finally."

Percy Alden agreed with his chum, as did Pederson, the other half; but all the others endorsed Spooner's views, and on a vote being taken, the majority was seven to three in favour of De Souza. Brinscombe, therefore, accepted

his inclusion, and after a short debate on the team tactics to be employed in the great match, the meeting adjourned.

"I hope it is all right about De Souza," remarked the captain, as he and his friend Alden strolled over to their House. "Do you think I was wrong in listening to these fellows?"

"Not a bit," Percy replied. "I don't fancy De Souza any more than you do, and I don't like the chap; but he's a good player, and won't let us down."

"I hope not," was Brinscombe's somewhat doubtful rejoinder. "I'm awfully keen on winning this last match."

"Oh, the College will win all right, old chap, don't worry. Go and have a good sleep, and dream of goals galore. Good-night."

Next morning, after breakfast, there was a general rush to the notice board to see the names of the Fifteen selected, and, on the whole, the team was pronounced to be the best available. One or two of the rejected candidates appeared visibly disconcerted as they scanned the list; but with the exception of Assinder none openly criticised the captain's choice. Along with his friend De Souza he had strolled

up with high anticipations of finding his name on the list, and it was only after a second careful scrutiny that he was convinced that he was not in the team.

"I've got Dobson's place all right," commented De Souza with satisfaction, "and upon my word it is only fair. 'Dobby' isn't half quick enough on his feet. But I say, old man, I don't see your name."

"Because I'm not chosen," broke out Assinder angrily. "Brinscombe always was down on me, and he's shown his spite by giving that slacker Kindersley his cap. It's a beastly shame, and I only hope the College get a good licking," and with this ill-judged remark the speaker turned on his heel and forced his way through the crowd of juniors, followed by his friend.

A murmur of disgust and disapproval rose from the seething mob of youngsters before the notice board, and as soon as the two seniors were out of earshot there was a general outburst of indignation. "Serve him right." "Jolly glad he's not in the team." "Wants the Academy to win, does he?"

"Ah, ah! I don't see Mr. Ass's name on the list," mimicked Brown Junior, pretending

to put an eyeglass to his eye, and imitating De Souza's precise, Eurasian manner of accentuating his syllables. "I'm ree-ly awfullee sorr-ee, don't you know."

A roar of laughter greeted this sally ; but the appearance of Brinscombe silenced any further comments regarding the disappointed Assinder. The captain merely pinned another paper to the board, and passed on, the second notice being greeted with a loud burst of cheering. It ran as follows :—

"In addition to the Fifteen chosen to play against Marsden Academy, H. R. Dobson has been given his cap.

"C. BRINSCOMBE."

If De Souza had only seen this notice it would have saved him from a nasty snub which his own arrogance brought upon himself. As he turned into the sixth classroom he came upon Alden and Dobson chatting together. The latter, catching sight of him, came forward at once and held out his hand.

"I want to congratulate you," he said pleasantly. "I'm awfully sorry not to play against the Academy ; but you've played for your place."

"Thanks," answered De Souza, taking the proffered hand languidly. "I rather fancied they would choose a quick half; but perhaps you'll get a cap next season."

Dobson's face flushed. He seemed about to speak, and then turned away. Percy Alden took his arm, remarking, however, to De Souza as he did so,—

"You're a bit previous with your condolences. If you look at the board you'll see that Brinscombe has already given Dobson his cap."

An ugly look came into De Souza's swarthy face as he gazed after the two friends, and Brinscombe, coming in hurriedly, stood amazed at his expression.

"Hullo, Suzie, got the toothache?" he inquired anxiously. "For any sake go and have it out at once."

The Eurasian had pulled himself together when he became aware of the other's presence, and hastened to explain that he felt quite fit.

"Well, you certainly didn't look it just now," was Brinscombe's rejoinder. "If you're not feeling well or up to the mark you should give Dobson your place. The Marsden forwards won't spare you, remember."

Under his captain's gaze De Souza's colour rose, though he still protested his fitness for the game. The bell rang, and Brinscombe hurried on, leaving the other trembling. It was bad enough to be snubbed in front of another for an ungenerous sneer ; it was worse to feel that his captain suspected his grit, and, worst of all, to know that there might be grounds for the suspicion.

"He wants Dobson to get my place even yet," the lad muttered to himself angrily. "But I'll play to spite them all—even if I knew the College would lose."

Keen athlete though he was, Doctor Porchester was a keener disciplinarian, and it did not improve De Souza's temper to receive a rebuke when he entered the classroom several minutes late. Football was a capital game, as the headmaster knew from personal experience ; but, as he often remarked, education came first in the curriculum, and he was placed there to see that it was properly imparted. Consequently all thoughts of games and sports had to be left behind in the playing fields, and many a College boy had found from bitter experience that this was a rule it was better to observe literally. The present occasion was

no exception, and not till the lunch bell rang at one o'clock did even the most venturesome junior hazard a remark about the coming match.

As the boys trooped out of their classrooms a four-in-hand containing the Academy Fifteen drove up with a flourish of horns. A round of cheering greeted their arrival, and, along with the Head, Brinscombe went forward and welcomed the visitors, who were shown into the dining-hall. Here lunch was eaten, the rival Fifteens, along with Dobson and the prefects, being seated at a separate table. Being a half holiday, the boys were free immediately lunch was over; and as the match did not commence until three, the Academy boys strolled around, some going down to the playing fields, where a large contingent of their supporters had already arrived on the scene.

As three o'clock approached the excitement round the ropes increased, and Academy and College juniors scrambled for the best places, and indulged in good-humoured if somewhat rude remarks. Brown Junior and his boon companions Smithers, otherwise known as the "Pug," and Jenkins, were in the thick of the fun, and enjoying themselves immensely.

"Hi, there, don't shove like that!" shouted the redoubtable Brown to a group of Academy youngsters; "you'll want a back seat after the game begins."

"Ya! get out yourself," was the polite retort. "Our forwards will run your men off their feet. Mason has been keeping himself for this game. Wait till he gets going."

Mason was the leader of the Academy forwards, a great burly fellow of thirteen stone, in whom his supporters placed immense confidence.

"Bah! he's only fit for Barnum and Bailey's," was the Pug's brilliant rejoinder. "Fancy him trying to catch Alden!"

"He won't need to," was the reply. "Your backs will never smell the ball."

"Won't they just! Wait till you see!"

"The Academy don't play niggers, anyhow," said another, alluding to De Souza, a remark which nearly resulted in a free fight.

Meantime the rival teams were stripping, and Brinscombe took the opportunity of giving a few last words of encouragement to his men. It had not escaped his notice that De Souza had taken offence at his remarks of the morning, and was still inclined to sulk and

play the martyr. As captain, however, it was his duty to see that perfect *esprit de corps* animated his team, and he took the first chance of putting things right.

"Feeling quite fit again, Suzie?" he said, laying his hand on his shoulder. "I expect great things from you to-day. Get out the ball as quick as you can, and we'll back you up to our last ounce."

The Eurasian turned away with a snappy "all right," and a minute later the teams were out and lining up. A great burst of cheering greeted their appearance, succeeded by a sudden hush of expectancy as the ball was placed for the kick-off. As ill luck would have it, De Souza's position was close to the spot where Brown Junior and his friends were waging wordy warfare, and an allusion to College niggers caught his ear, and fanned his smouldering ill-temper to white heat. He took a hasty step towards the ropes just as the Academy captain kicked off; but a warning shout of "Look out, Souza!" recalled him suddenly to his surroundings, and he turned to see the ball coming straight for him. Flurried and excited, he misfielded, and though he recovered it, Mason was down on him like a

shot, and flung him violently to the ground. The ball spun out of his hands, and the whole line of opposing forwards made off with it at their toes. Morrison flung himself pluckily on the ball, but was hustled aside by force of numbers, and within two minutes of the start Marsden scored right under the posts, thus enabling the visiting captain to kick the easiest of goals.

The Academy boys cheered themselves hoarse, flung their caps in the air, and thumped each other energetically on the back.

“ Good old Mason ! Well played, sir ! Keep it up ! ”

Brown Junior and others of his persuasion ground their teeth in dismay amidst the general hubbub ; nor could they raise a retort amongst them to the jeers and gibes poured upon them by supporters of the Marsden yellow and black.

“ Where’s your nigger now ? What price the Barnum and Bailey freak ? ”

The Pug and his companions shrunk together, blaming De Souza vehemently under their breath ; but as Brinscombe’s cheery “ Now, College ! ” followed the resumption of hostilities they plucked up heart to send forth a feeble cheer.

After the sensational opening the game settled down about midfield, and some scrambling work took place before the players got over their early excitement. Gradually the visitors forced their way back to the home 25, and here some fierce exchanges took place. It early became evident that the College were badly outweighed forward, and that their only chance lay in their speedy backs. But here also there was a screw loose which put the machinery out of order, and spoilt their usual combination. De Souza appeared quite unnerved by his initial mistake, and everything he attempted went wrong. Time after time he was caught in possession when the three-quarters were waiting for a pass, and as the Academy forwards, seeing their weakness, played upon him, he completely lost his head and his temper. Had it not been for the sterling defence of Pederson, Brinscombe, Morrison, and Co., Marsden would have run up a big score in the first forty-five minutes. As it was, half time was called with the score unaltered, though the game had been wholly in home territory.

As the players crossed over, Spooner went up to his captain, who was outwardly as cheerful as ever, though covered with mud from head to foot.

"I'm sorry about De Souza," he said shortly. "You were right. The chap's useless ; but if you fellows behind can hang on for a bit we may pull it off yet. Their forwards are tiring, and our fellows are trained to go on all the day."

"I thought so," was Brinscombe's reply. "Well, keep them going, and get the ball out on every opportunity. I'm going to put Percy half ; Souza can't stand up to their heavy-weights."

Accordingly, when the game was resumed, Alden and De Souza changed places, and the wisdom of the move was at once apparent. Marsden still ruled the roost forward, but, along with Pederson, Alden nursed the touch line, and baffled every effort to pierce the defence. Time wore on, and the strenuous work began to tell on the Academy forwards. Gradually the College forced their way up the field, and for the first time crossed the half-way line. Here at last the ball came out on the home side of the scrum, and like a flash Pederson scooped it back to Alden. The latter took the pass beautifully, and made off at top speed. A swerve brought him past the opposing halves, a feint to Brinscombe diddled the centre "threes," and then it was all up with the de-

fence. None of them could touch the College flier in pace, and, running right round the full back, he grounded the ball between the posts.

The yell that followed could have been heard for miles away, and was kept up long after Brinscombe had landed a goal and the players were at it again hammer and tongs.

"College! College! Bravo, Alden, do it again!"

"Buck up, Academy! Get the ball!"

Brown Junior and the Pug were purple in the face and quite inarticulate. The referee was already looking at his watch when another rush took the College to their opponents' 25 and a scrum—probably the last—was formed. Mason came through with the ball at his feet, but, stumbling, sent it straight to Alden. The latter was "downed" in a twinkling, but not before he had sent out a long, swinging pass to his captain, who was standing ready. Judging his distance as his opponents rushed on him, Brinscombe coolly took a short run forward, and then with an easy drop sent the ball spinning over the post. Almost at the same moment the referee's whistle blew, and the College ran out winners of the hardest game ever seen at Felton.

## CHAPTER II.

### THE LOST LETTER.

"IT was certainly touch and go for our unbeaten record," remarked Brinscombe for the twentieth time, "and I only wish I could give you another 'cap.' But for you we should have lost to a dead certainty."

"Oh, nonsense," replied Alden modestly; "the first score was as easy as falling off a log, and if it hadn't been for your grand 'drop' we should only have drawn."

"Thanks to you again," said Cecil. "The ball came right into my hands. I simply couldn't miss at that distance."

The two friends were strolling up and down the playground arm in arm amongst the other boys, discussing the points in the great match of the previous afternoon. It was the general topic of the day, and De Souza came in for some scathing remarks even from those who had previously been his champions. Catching

the Eurasian's name uttered in a loud, contemptuous tone by a junior, Brinscombe turned to his companion.

"I'm sorry for Souza," he said, "and I feel that it was mainly my fault, allowing myself to be overruled by the others. He is too light to stand up to heavy weights like Mason. I tried to give him a word of encouragement in the pavilion before we turned out, but don't think he took it altogether in good part."

"He's a queer-tempered chap," replied Percy, "but talking of the pavilion reminds me of a matter I wished to speak to you about. When I was leaving the pavilion yesterday I found that I had forgotten my sweater, and ran back to get it. The place was empty, you fellows had all gone away, and as I turned to leave, my eye fell on something white lying under one of the seats. There was nothing peculiar about it in any way—you know what a mess the 'pav' is in after a match—but some impulse moved me to stoop and pick it up. It seems to be a letter, as you will see, but there is something—Here it is; I stuffed it into my pocket and forgot all about it in the excitement of the moment."

He fumbled in his coat pocket, and pro-

ducing a number of papers, selected one and held it out for his friend's inspection. It appeared to be an ordinary double paged sheet of foreign writing paper folded in three, one end being slipped into the other in order to keep it fastened. Brinscombe turned it over to find if there was any address, and discovered nothing but the word "Immediate" written across one corner.

"No address there," he said carelessly, handing it back to his friend, "and as it is marked 'immediate,' if I were you I'd open it, and if you can find out whose it is, return it at once."

"I suppose so," replied Percy, "but one does not care to read a private letter——"

"Oh, of course not," interrupted Cecil, "but it is very unlikely that there is anything important in it, and you'll probably see at a glance for whom it is intended. No one can object to you simply opening it to find out the owner's name."

Percy hesitated a moment, while Brinscombe, apparently dismissing the matter from his mind, moved on.

"Hurry up, man," he called over his shoulder impatiently; "there's the post, and I expect a letter about my exam. Hullo!"

The exclamation rose to his lips involuntarily, and he stood gazing in amazement at the unexpected development.

Urged by Cecil's call to hasten, Percy had determined to follow his friend's advice, but in opening the unaddressed letter it fluttered from his hand and fell to the ground. Stooping to pick it up, he noticed that it bore a curious mark in red ink in one corner, but before he had time to discover more he staggered back under a sudden blow.

" You thief ! " hissed a voice, and recovering himself he found De Souza standing beside him trembling with passion.

" You thief ! " repeated the Eurasian, with clenched fist raised as though to repeat the blow. " Give me my letter."

Bewildered though he was by the sudden onslaught and slow to take offence, Alden could hardly fail to understand the other's meaning.

" You cur," he said, his temper thoroughly roused, " you low cur ! To think such a thing and hit a fellow unawares. Take your wretched letter and yourself out of this before I give you a jolly good licking."

Crumbling up the missive, he was about to

fling it in the Eurasian's face, when Brinscombe intervened and stayed his hand.

"Hold on, old chap," he said curtly, "don't dirty your hand with this fellow. Give me the letter."

He took the paper, stuffed it into his pocket, and then turned to De Souza.

"Now," he continued, "you'll get your letter—when you apologize. Until then you had better keep yourself to—yourself. Fellows like you are beneath contempt. Come on, Percy," and slipping his arm through his friend's he drew him away from the little knot of boys who had gathered, hardly knowing what was amiss. Indeed, so sudden had been the whole affair that few of the boys strolling around had noticed anything unusual, and it was mainly from De Souza's black and scowling looks that they guessed something unpleasant had occurred.

"Been getting a wigging from Brinscombe about his play yesterday," suggested some one as De Souza shouldered his way out of the crowd; and as the idea met with general approval, it was adopted unanimously as being at least a shrewd guess.

Meantime Brinscombe and his friend had

reached their study, and Cecil pounced on a letter lying on the table and tore it open.

"Hurrah!" he shouted, waving it above his head, "I've passed. Ordered to proceed East at once and report myself at Singapore for further instructions. Hurrah!"

"Congratulations, old man; that's splendid," said Alden, cordially wringing his hand. "Singapore! that's quite close to Penang. If you're still there when I go out to visit my pater next term, we ought to see quite a lot of each other."

"I must tell the Doctor," said Brinscombe, "and find out what he thinks I should do. Wait here till I come back, like a good chap. I shan't be long."

He rushed from the room almost before he had finished speaking, and Alden turned to his own correspondence, a couple of letters, which were lying on the table.

One was from his aunt, asking him to stay with her in London after leaving school and preparatory to his going abroad. The other was from his father, Acting Resident in Penang, discussing Percy's approaching visit to the East and arranging details.

"A six months' visit out here," he wrote,

"will give you a glimpse of the world and broaden your outlook ; but remember I want you to take your part in University life afterwards, and it will be a great disappointment to me if you do not qualify yourself in every way to fill the place in your uncle's office in London which he has generously offered on your behalf. I am sincerely glad to hear that there is a prospect of Cecil Brinscombe coming out to join the police force. There are capital openings for young fellows of his stamp, and I shall be pleased to do anything I can to further his interests. His father and I were great friends years ago at Felton College, and until his lamentable death in the Boer War we corresponded regularly."

The rest of the letter was taken up with private news and directions as to what outfit his son would require, and Percy had barely finished reading it when Brinscombe returned breathless but triumphant.

"The Doctor's a brick," he announced enthusiastically, "he's given me the afternoon off—you too, old chap, and wants us both to go round to supper with him this evening. Says I should pack up and go off to-morrow and see these Colonial fellows. Come on ! let's

go for a good spin and talk it all over. I can stuff my things into my portmanteau to-morrow. Game?"

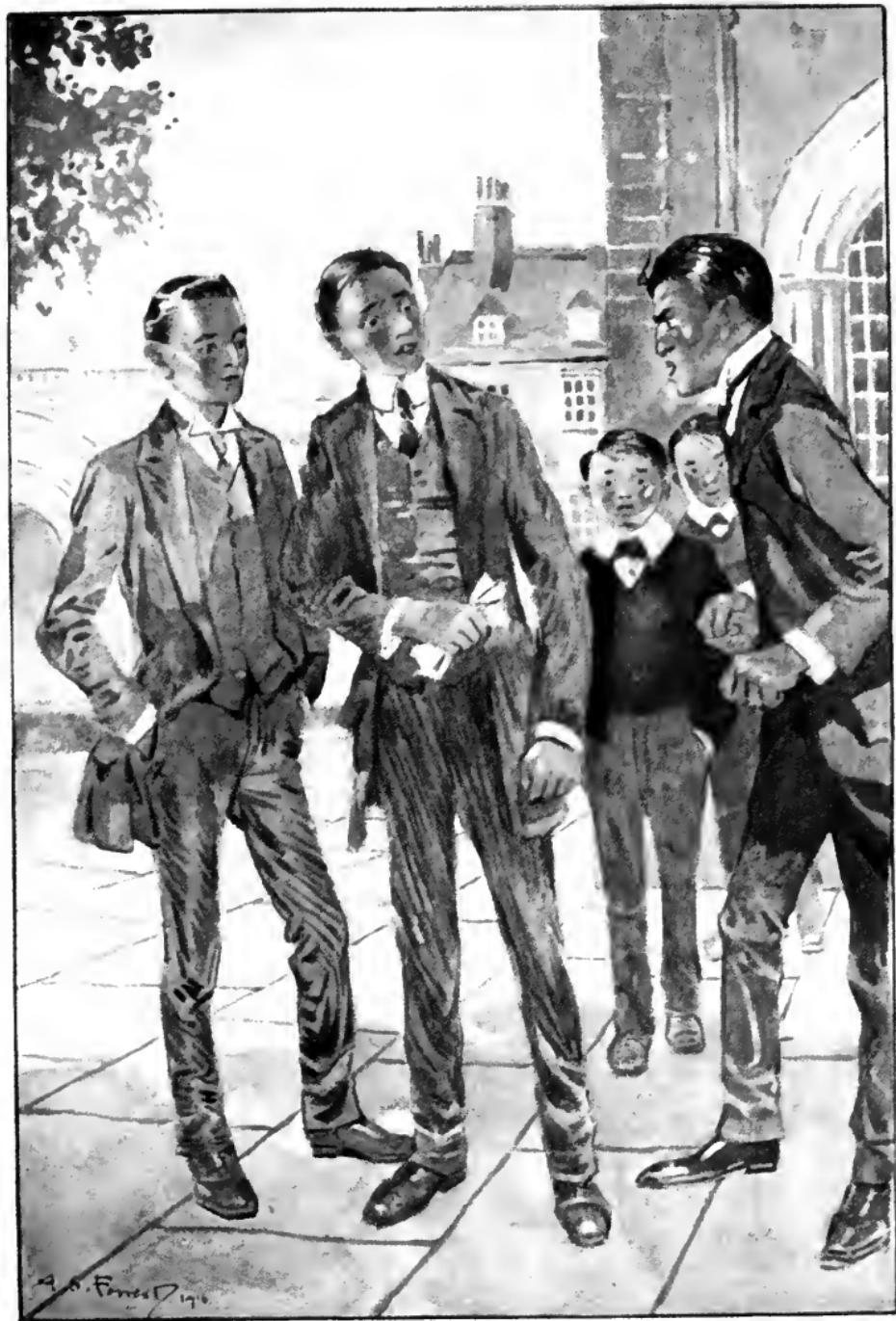
"Rather," rejoined Percy, hardly less excited than his friend. "I've just heard from my pater—reading his letter now—and he's fixed up my visit for April."

"That's splendid. I only wish you could come out with me now. But never mind, we'll meet somehow. Let's go up through Collyn Wood and back by the Cliffs."

The two friends set out at a brisk pace, past the playing fields, where the green turf still bore the marks of the eventful match, across the burn with a flying leap, disdaining the little plank bridge, and up the steep hill on the farther side leading to Collyn Wood. At the top they paused a moment, and Brinscombe cast his first regretful glance backwards.

"I've played my last match there for the College," he said, nodding towards the goal posts, dwarfed in the distance; "but I wouldn't have missed yesterday's game for anything."

He turned, with what almost sounded like a sigh, and led the way onward to the wood. Warmed by the brisk exercise and the buoyancy of healthy youth, his spirits quickly rose,



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"You thief!" repeated the Eurasian, with clenched fist.  
"Give me my letter."



and he confided to his companion the visions of life in the glorious East which filled his thoughts. Percy in return told him all that he had gathered from his father's letters about that enchanted land, and together they pictured the rousing times they would have when they met in a few months' time.

"I *do* hope we shall meet," said Brinscombe once again; "but I told you that probationers, as they call us—rotten name, isn't it?—are generally sent to Canton or Amoy for a year or two to learn Chinese before they get appointed to the Malay States."

"So you did. I'd forgotten that," said Percy, rather crestfallen. "But perhaps my pater can work the oracle for you."

"I hope so," replied Cecil rather doubtfully, "it would be awfully decent if he did; but we have to learn Chinese somewhere, you know, and pass some rotten exam. You'll have no end of a time out there through having a Resident for a pater. What does he do? A sort of Lord High Everything, isn't he?"

"I don't quite know what he does," Alden confessed; "signs papers and writes reports, I suppose. He's under the Governor of Singapore, you see, and only looks after Penang."

"Quite good enough to be going on with," was Cecil's flippant reply. "Fancy being lord and master of a whole island! Rather a spree, eh?"

"The pater says it is very hard work, but it must be more interesting than law. He wants me to go into my uncle's law office, you know, after I've taken my degree at Oxford."

"So you told me. You'll have a ripping time at Oxford though, get into the Fifteen and all that sort of thing, and then lawyers make thumping big incomes—" The speaker broke off abruptly, then added, "Hullo, there's the sea!"

The lads had emerged from the wood on to the cliffs, and the keen sea breeze from the east whistled past them and made their faces tingle.

"That's good, isn't it?" said Brinscombe, inhaling the keen air with relish; "makes a chap run in spite of himself. Come on, I'll race you back to the College."

"Right O!" and the two set off at a jog trot. It was a good four miles home, but the lads were in capital training and cut out the pace in good style. The light was beginning to fail and a fog was creeping up over the Channel when the College at length loomed in sight.

Brinscombe was leading by quite a hundred yards when he set himself down for the final dash ; but here Percy's superior speed told, and overhauling Cecil in the playground he dashed into the study and flung himself into a chair.

" Won ! " he gasped, as Brinscombe rushed in a second later and followed his example.

" You're too fast," panted Cecil, glancing up at the clock ; " it's only five now. Time to pack after all before going over to the Doctor's. We're not due till half-past seven."

" I'll give you a hand when I've recovered my wind," said Percy, and for a space the friends sat quiet, being too breathless for speech.

" By-the-bye," said Alden at length, sitting up, " what about this De Souza business ? I forgot all about it in the excitement of your news."

" That's just what I hoped and expected," replied Cecil dryly, " and I don't see that you need bother about it any more. The fellow will probably write you an apology, and that will be the end of it."

" Yes," replied Alden rather doubtfully, " but then he struck me, you know, and called me a thief. Don't you think——"

"No, I don't. The chap had evidently lost all control over himself, and you can't fight him when you know you could lick him with one hand."

"No, that's true; but it isn't pleasant to be called a thief. Before all the fellows, too."

"That is so; but I don't think any one heard him bar myself, and no one in the College is ass enough to believe him for a moment. It's really just as unpleasant to apologize, and he's got to do that before he gets his precious letter."

"Well, if you think it's all right, I'll leave it at that," replied Alden, after a moment's hesitation. "What did you do with the letter?"

"Left it in my pocket where I stuffed it," said Cecil carelessly—"at least I think so; but anyhow it's all right. Come on now and let's get the packing done. By-the-bye, this is your Norfolk jacket I've got on. I couldn't find my own and bagged yours to save time."

"Right O! but you can leave it behind. You won't need that sort of clothing out East, and it will do me nicely for this term at least."

They set to work with vigour, and the room was soon in an indescribable condition of confusion, piles of clothing, cricket bats, books, photographs, and other schoolboy treasures

lying in every direction. The portmanteau, flannel cricket bag, and hand bag were stuffed full to repletion, and even then various articles were left out in the cold.

"We'll never get this locked," said Brinscombe, after a desperate struggle with the portmanteau; "and as for the rest of the things, they must just stay behind. You fall heir to everything, old man, except mementoes for Spooner, Dobson, and one or two others."

"Thanks, awfully," replied Percy, jumping violently on the trunk. "I'd like to have something of yours as keepsake, but I'll get my aunt to store the rest for you when I go up to London. Try the lock now."

A desperate struggle ensued, but at length Brinscombe rose, breathless and defeated.

"It's no good," he repeated, with a glance at his watch, "and it's time we were off to the Doctor's. I've fastened the straps, and if we leave it like that all night perhaps the lock will meet to-morrow. Hurry up, I wouldn't like to be late for my last night at College."

The arrival of Dobson, Spooner, and other boon companions with congratulations and eager questioning was not calculated to aid the keeping of this good resolution. Photos and

addresses were exchanged, Brinscombe's cricket bats had to be handed over as precious mementoes, and their points had to be expatiated on and duly admired. All this took time, and it was only a brilliant suggestion of Percy's that they should escort Cecil as far as the Doctor's gate that saved the situation.

Cheers for "good old Brinscombe" were still ringing in their ears when they were ushered into Doctor Porchester's dining-room.

"Come away, boys," said the Head cordially, advancing from the fireplace. "I was afraid your friends wouldn't let you off—in time to enjoy Kitty's scones, which she made specially in your honour. No doubt they wished to show their regard for you in their way."

"Boys are always so noisy," remarked Kitty, with a toss of her head—"and so late," she added, with an indignant glance at the two culprits which made them feel very much ashamed of themselves. However, when they had offered humble apologies and duly praised the excellence of the scones, harmony was restored, and the two boys settled down to enjoy themselves immensely. Brinscombe's appointment and immediate departure was the

main topic of conversation, and Kitty was full of curiosity with regard to his future work, and life in the East generally. Percy had frequently to come to his friend's assistance, and ultimately Doctor Porchester had to come to the assistance of both.

"I see your ideas of your Eastern duties are rather vague," he said, laughing, when Cecil had attempted in vain to show that he was not going to become what Kitty contemptuously called a "common policeman." "I do not myself profess to know much about the Federated Malay States, but understand you are going out as a probationer."

"Yes, that is what they call it."

"Well, the first thing required of you is a knowledge of the Chinese language, and after you have acquired that and become a passed probationer, you are supposed to be an expert in dealing with the wily Chinaman."

"It doesn't sound very interesting," remarked Kitty.

"Perhaps not," replied her father; "but it is said that the Chinaman as an individual is the most interesting and complex of human beings, and very few Europeans are capable of understanding him."

"But what have Chinamen got to do with the Malay States?" asked Kitty.

"They practically do all the work throughout the States," said Doctor Porchester. "The Malays are an indolent race, and quite unfit to cope with the industrious yellow man. I suppose your father has mostly Chinamen to deal with, Alden?"

"Yes, sir, I believe so. He says the higher class merchants are very honest, much straighter than half-castes."

"Quite so. By-the-bye, talking of Penang reminds me that De Souza told me just this afternoon that he would be returning there at the end of this term. So that it is just possible you may meet out East."

"De Souza! How funny!"

Doctor Porchester noted the lack of cordiality in the boy's tone, and it confirmed what he had already suspected.

"If you happen to meet," he went on more seriously, "I hope you will not allow Eastern prejudices to stand in the way of your friendship. Remember that you were all educated here together, and treat him as you would any other Collegian."

From this, talk drifted on to College affairs,

and it was with a start of surprise that the Doctor heard eleven chime from the clock.

"Eleven o'clock, and still out of bed, Kitty!" he exclaimed in dismay. "Say good-night and run away, miss, at once."

"Good-night, daddy," said Kitty, kissing her father and giving her hand to the two boys. "Good-bye, Mr. Policeman. Remember the Siamése kitten you promised me."

Doctor Porchester only kept his visitors a few minutes while he gave Brinscombe some words of kindly advice. Then with a hearty hand-grip he bade him God-speed, and advised him to get a good night's sleep, in view of his journey.

The two friends arm-in-arm strolled slowly back to their own quarters. The full moon was shedding a brilliant light over the deserted playground, and their footsteps echoed against the walls of the stately old College. Both lads were silent. The Doctor's parting words had brought home to Brinscombe the fact that he was at the parting of the ways from boyhood to manhood, and at the thought a flood of recollections swept over him of all that he was leaving behind. He roused himself with a sigh, and turned to his companion.

"A penny for your thoughts," he said, with rather a forced attempt at gaiety.

"Eh?—well, to tell you the truth," replied Percy, "I was thinking about that letter I picked up in the pavilion. Somehow I—Hark!" he broke off suddenly, coming to a halt. "Did you hear anything?"

"No," said Cecil, after a moment's pause. "What was it?"

"I don't quite know," said Percy. "It sounded almost like a groan. Perhaps my nerves are on edge, but I feel quite eerie tonight. Hurry up, and let's get to bed."

Laughing at his companion's imagination, Brinscombe hastened his steps; but they had only advanced a few yards when a deep groan startled them both.

"Listen! there it is again," exclaimed Percy, peering ahead. "It seems to come from the direction of our rooms. Whatever can it be?"

"Look!" said Brinscombe, "there is something lying in the dark close to the wall. Some one must be hurt. Come on!"

Another groan hastened their movements, and, hurrying across the playground, they came across a prostrate form lying huddled on the ground. As they bent over anxiously

the figure stirred with an effort and sat upright.

"De Souza! What's wrong? What on earth are you doing here?"

"My ankle!" moaned De Souza. "I've twisted it badly."

"All right, old chap; we'll carry you to your bunk. But what are you doing here at this time?"

An inarticulate groan was the only response, and the two friends proceeded to carry the sufferer back to his own room. Once deposited on his bed, Brinscombe proposed to go in search of the matron; but to this De Souza objected, stating that he felt much better, and would be all right after a good night's sleep.

"Well, you can please yourself as to that," said Brinscombe. "We've done all we can. You must make your own explanations if you are asked what you were doing prowling about at this hour. We shan't split on you."

"Thank you for helping me back," replied De Souza evasively. "Before you go I want also to apologize to you, Alden, for what I said this morning."

"Oh, that's all right," interrupted Percy

hurriedly, fearful of participating in a "scene."  
"I know you didn't mean it."

He shook De Souza's proffered hand heartily and turned to go.

"The letter—" began the Eurasian.

"I'll send you the letter to-morrow," said Brinscombe from the door. "Are you sure we can do nothing more for you?"

"Quite sure, thanks. I shall be all right now."

"A rum go this!" remarked Cecil as they gained their own rooms. "What do you make of it?"

"Oh, the usual thing," replied Percy carelessly—"having some lark on, no doubt. However, he'll have to explain it to-morrow if there's a row. He gave me quite a fright, groaning like that."

"Why should he be found under our window—which happens to be open?" began Brinscombe, when Alden cut him short.

"Why? why? why?" he mimicked, yawning. "Kitty was right—you're a regular policeman, with your questions and suspicions. The window's open because we left it so, like the portmanteau there, which seems to have burst its bands again."

"So it has," said Cecil, gazing at it thoughtfully. "Now that's funny."

"Do you know it's after midnight?" was all Percy's reply. "Good-night."

## CHAPTER III.

### THE DUTCHMAN'S JOKE.

NEXT morning Cecil Brinscombe left Felton College amidst the cheers of his admiring friends, and went up to London to report himself for further orders. Within a week the final arrangements were hurried through, and he found himself on board the R.M.S. *India*, *en route* for Singapore and the East. Awaiting him on the vessel was a note from his chum Percy, wishing him good luck, and expressing the hope that they would soon meet again. In a hurried postscript Alden added : “ De Souza has been asking me again about that letter of his. I don’t know why he is so keen about it ; but do have another look, like a good chap, and see if you can find it.”

“ Bother De Souza ! ” muttered Brinscombe to himself, shoving the note into his pocket. “ What can he want with that wretched letter ? ”

I told him when I left Felton that I had lost it. However, I'll have another look for it."

He overhauled all the clothes in his cabin trunk, but failed to discover the missing letter, and, apprising Alden of the fact in a hasty scribble sent ashore with the pilot at Plymouth, he forthwith forgot all about the matter.

In due course Alden received his friend's communication, and at the first opportunity imparted the news to De Souza.

"I'm awfully sorry about it, Souza," he remarked; "but you know what a careless beggar Brinscombe always was about his things. No doubt he tore the letter up and threw it away along with his own."

"It is very annoying," replied the Eurasian, evidently much put out, "because I was expecting some information—some important information—from my father with regard to his business."

"I'm afraid I can't help you," said Alden, who was tired of the whole affair, "because I don't even know whether the letter came from your father. By the way, though, we both noticed that it had no stamp. Are you sure——"

"Yes, I know that. It was enclosed in a

note forwarded from our agents in London, and must have slipped out of my pocket after the match. Do you think," he went on, after a slight hesitation—" do you think Brinscombe could have left it behind by mistake ? "

" No, I don't," answered Alden shortly. " What makes you think that ? "

" Oh, nothing," replied De Souza, rather awkwardly. " Only, if it wasn't in his portmanteau, where can it be ? "

" I never said it wasn't in his portmanteau. I said that Brinscombe had probably torn it up along with his other papers. Hullo ! there's the bell. If I hear anything further I'll let you know."

The Eurasian replied with a grunt which showed that he was not altogether satisfied with this promise. In the course of the next few weeks he reminded Alden on one or two occasions of his promise ; but the latter, having nothing further to communicate, dismissed the matter from his mind.

The remainder of the term passed rapidly, and almost before he could realize the fact Percy had bidden farewell to the College and his schoolmates for the last time. De Souza, who was also leaving, travelled up with him

to London, and appeared much interested to hear of Alden's forthcoming visit to Penang.

"If I had known sooner we might have gone out together," he remarked in a tone of regret which rather astonished Percy. "Perhaps it is not too late to arrange it yet, if your berth is not taken. I sail by the Japanese liner *Saidu Maru* on the 8th. Would that suit you?"

"I'm afraid not. You see, I've promised to stay a week or two with my aunt before I sail, and can't possibly get away before the 14th, at any rate."

"I'm sorry," said De Souza, shaking hands as they parted at the station; "but you might let me know what ship you choose. A line to that address will find me. Good-bye."

"Good-bye," replied Alden, adding to himself as he collected his luggage and jumped into a cab, "I wonder why Souza is so anxious to know my plans, all of a sudden."

For the next few days Percy had plenty to occupy his attention—visiting the tailor, calling on his cousins, and being introduced to his future partners in his uncle's office. About a week after his arrival in town he happened to be in the City, booking his berth with the P. and

O. agents, when, on coming out of the offices, he ran against De Souza, who was accompanied by Assinder and a tall, dark man.

"Hullo, Alden," said the Eurasian, evidently pleased at the meeting. "I was just thinking about you. Have you taken your passage yet?"

"Just been booking with the P. and O.," replied Percy, nodding to Assinder.

"What ship?"

"The *Caledonia*."

"When does she sail?"

"On the 15th."

"Why, then, you'll only be a week after me. Assinder and his father," he continued, indicating the others, who had walked on, "have been in town on business, and very kindly looked me up. I'm off to-morrow morning. I hope you'll have a good voyage on the *Caledonia*, and enjoy your visit to Penang."

"Thanks. Same to you. Good-bye."

Alden felt somewhat annoyed at the incident. It seemed to him rather impertinent of the Eurasian to pry so persistently into his private arrangements, especially after their strained relations at the College. The feeling was but momentary. After all, what harm

was there in asking when he was sailing? It mattered little to any one, and least of all to De Souza, who probably wished to make amends for his former conduct by evincing a friendly interest in his movements. It was queer to think that next time they met it would, in all probability, be in Penang.

The 15th soon came, and after a somewhat tearful parting from his aunt, Percy found himself, along with several hundreds of fellow-passengers, on board the "special" running to Tilbury. He felt rather lonely and disconsolate amongst the jostling, chattering crowd who shoved their way on to the tugs plying between the pier and the liner. Being unencumbered with luggage—his boxes having been sent on ahead—he took up a position on the after-deck, and watched the busy scene with interest. Very soon the clangour of the ship's bell warned the passengers' friends that time was up, and by degrees they were shepherded on to the waiting tug. Several frenzied partings had to be cut short almost by force; but at last the tug cast off, the liner's screw began to revolve, and with a parting cheer from those left behind the *Caledonia* started on her long voyage.

Soon afterwards a drizzling rain blotted out the view of the river banks, and, feeling depressed, Percy went below to inspect his cabin and get ready for tea. As he opened the door something descended with a thump on his head, flinging him violently against the washing-stand opposite. There was a roar of laughter, which subsided suddenly as he picked himself up.

"The wrong man, by Jove!" exclaimed a boyish voice in dismay, and, looking round, Alden perceived an impish face peering down from the upper of the two inner berths.

"I wish it had been the right man," retorted Percy angrily, rubbing his head. "What the blazes do you mean by setting a booby trap like that?"

"I'm awfully sorry," replied the other, jumping down, "and I hope you'll forgive me and make it up. My name's Hollands, and if we're to be berth companions we should have no end of a time."

"Oh, it's all right," said Percy, forcing a laugh, "though you nearly broke my neck. My name is Alden. What game are you up to?"

"Well, when I came in here half an hour

ago, I found a foreign Johnnie, German or something, rummaging about my traps, and thought I'd teach him a lesson. Pretended he didn't understand what I said, gabbled a lot of nonsense, and bowed most politely in the silly way they have."

"I suppose he has the other bunk," said Percy.

"Yes, probably. That's his bag that landed on your head, anyway. Do you know anything about him?"

"Not I. Perhaps he made a mistake about your things. Hullo! there's the tea bell. We'd better hurry up."

During tea Percy struck up a great friendship with his new companion, who, it appeared, was a middy in the Royal Navy going out to rejoin his ship on the Australian station. Though a mere boy in appearance, Hollands had already served some years in the China Squadron, and had been invalided home. He had evidently benefited greatly by his stay in England, and his appetite was something to marvel at, while he was full of fun and merriment.

"There's our friend," he whispered, "at the centre table, half-way down the opposite

side, next that ripping girl in blue. Solemn-faced ass, isn't he ? ”

Percy glanced across at the place indicated, and noticed the individual referred to. He was a big, loosely-built man, with a long black moustache and closely-cropped hair. But his most noticeable feature was the heavy, bushy eyebrows which overhung the coloured spectacles which he wore over his green, shifty eyes. Though his glance never left his plate, Percy had the uncomfortable feeling that his movements were observed, and that he in turn was being subjected to a careful scrutiny.

“ I don't like his looks somehow,” he remarked to his companion in an aside. “ Who is he—do you know ? ”

“ Richellmann is his name, the steward says, and he gives out that he is a naturalist. A jail-bird is much more likely, I think, with that close crop. I wish we could clear him out of our cabin. However, we'll make it hot for him. Have you done ? Come on, up on deck, and see if we can't have some fun.”

In this quest the boys were disappointed. The night was cold and wet, and few of the passengers were in the mood for games, and

Hollands and his companion soon withdrew to the smoking-room. Here the middy speedily made himself at home, and, sucking a huge cigar, began to spin some wonderful yarns for the benefit of any one in the neighbourhood. He proved himself also an adept at poker, euchre, bridge, and any other game at cards, while Percy watched his skill and coolness with wonder and admiration.

"They're a poor lot," remarked Hollands at length, when they retired to their cabin. "Not a player amongst them except that white-faced, consumptive-looking chap. Did you see Richellmann come in? He's evidently taken a fancy to you—watches you out of the corner of his eye like a brother. I'm going to give him 'apple pie' for his bed. Get into your bunk as quick as you can, and pretend to snore when he comes down. We'll hear some of the beautiful German language then, I expect."

But long before the intended victim arrived the two boys were sound asleep, and daylight was streaming in through the port-hole when the steward woke them for their coffee next morning.

"Why, we've had nearly a round of the

clock," yawned Hollands, stretching himself lazily. "I've slept like a top. Did you have a good night's rest, Mr. Richellmann?" he asked politely, looking over the edge of his bunk.

The Dutchman—for such it appeared he was—merely grunted and turned over on his side without deigning to reply.

"I don't know why some people are so grumpy in the morning," lamented Hollands pathetically, "but I find that a cold bath is a capital cure for the dumps. Come on, Alden, I'll race you to the baths. Are you ready? Go!"

A splash in the fresh, cold sea water set the blood tingling through their veins, and it was with sharpened appetites that they entered the dining saloon. The day being bright and clear, they watched the English coast gliding by, and about five o'clock Plymouth was reached and a tug came off with more passengers.

"You've a chance now of sending a line ashore with the pilot," remarked Hollands to his companion, "if there is any one you want to write to."

"Thanks for telling me," answered Alden. "I'll scribble a note to my aunt. Are you going to write?"

"Don't need to," explained the middy laconically; "keep a supply ready and send one off to my mater at each port we touch. Got my sister to write 'em when I was home, and they'll last for a long time."

No time was wasted in transhipping the passengers and their luggage; the pilot went on board the tug, and the liner resumed her voyage, heading south for the Mediterranean. At tea that evening several places were vacant at table, and when the two boys went on deck later the motion of the vessel had increased considerably.

"Getting into the Bay now," explained Hollands in answer to an inquiry by Alden; "generally get a tumble there in the best of weather. Don't think about it and you'll probably be all right; but if you *do* feel bad, go and lie down in your bunk. Let's see if any one wants a game at cards."

Percy followed him into the smoking-room, but declined a hand, and after watching the play for some time, retired to the cabin feeling decidedly uncomfortable. Sleep luckily came to his rescue, and, though giddy and nauseated, he managed to get through his breakfast safely next morning. Being Sunday, a service was

held by the captain in the first saloon; but Percy deemed it safer to lie on deck in a long chair, and his example was followed by many of the passengers. In the afternoon Hollands took him over the ship, introducing him, amongst other places, to the engine room, where he had already ingratiated himself. By degrees Alden found his sea legs, and before they were out of the Bay he had grown accustomed to the rolling of the ship, and was enjoying his meals once more. He went ashore with Hollands at Gibraltar, and narrowly escaped missing the boat, owing to some mischievous pranks the middy insisted on playing within the Spanish lines. Richellmann was one of those who went ashore, and he also scrambled on board at the last moment, dropping his topee *en route*, much to Hollands's delight. The weather was delightfully warm in the Mediterranean; the sea was calm, and deck games of all kinds were started. At Marseilles, where the overland mail was taken on board, the boys had another spell on shore, though here too the middy's love of fun and adventure nearly got them into trouble. "Just for a lark," as he expressed it, he hung around the fortifications, ostensibly taking notes, and it was only by means of a hurried and un-

dignified retreat that they evaded arrest. By the time Port Said was reached Percy was beginning to enjoy the voyage thoroughly. He had got to know all the nice people on board, and some of them, knowing his father, treated him with great kindness. Hollands, too, was a great favourite, and his liveliness and ceaseless pranks kept every one amused. As they slowly came to anchor off Port Said, a notice was put up stating that the *Caledonia* would not enter the canal until 5.30, and a great number of barges came alongside to discharge coal. For a while Percy watched the ceaseless line of sweating, dust - begrimed bargemen pouring a continuous stream of coal down into the bunkers, but at last Hollands discovered him and dragged him on deck.

"Come on," said the middy, "I want to get ashore out of this beastly mess, but you must see an Arab conjurer who's come aboard. My eye! He's as naked as when he was born, except for a loin cloth, but you should see his tricks! There he is."

Squatting in the midst of an admiring crowd of passengers, the Arab was proceeding to exhibit a well-known trick. A little heap of soil lay before him on the deck, and this he was sifting

to show that it contained nothing to aid him in his task. Next, from his scanty loin cloth he produced a seed, which was passed round and then ostentatiously stuck into the heap of earth. The dirty cloth covering his head was then placed over the earth, and the conjurer proceeded to play a few notes on a reed pipe. The covering was removed from the earth, and a tiny sprout, an inch high, was distinctly visible. The covering was replaced, the tune was renewed, and the plant, as if in response to the music, slowly forced the cloth upwards. Again the covering was removed, and there appeared a miniature mango tree quite six inches in height. This the Arab pulled up and passed round, showing the roots that had been thrown out during the plant's short existence. The conjurer then went round to collect coins, and incidentally gathered eggs and other trifles from the noses, hands, and elbows of the onlookers. Squatting again in the centre of the circle, the Arab extended a bare grimy paw, palm upwards and empty. Slowly closing the still extended hand, he opened it suddenly, and there lay a hen's egg, which disappeared when his hand was again closed. This trick was repeated, and on opening his

hand a second time a live chicken appeared. Taking the poor bird by the beak with his two hands, the conjurer seemed to separate the creature into twins, which he placed upon the deck to show that they were real. Hollands made a grab at one of the chickens "to examine it," but the Arab was too quick for him, and the birds disappeared whence they had come.

"Oh, come on!" cried Hollands, flinging the fellow a coin. "It's magic—black magic; but we'll have no time on shore if we don't go now. Hi, boat!"

Scrambling down the companion ladder, they were speedily landed on the pier, and, after a short altercation with the boatman about the fare, found their way to a tempting café in the main street. While doing justice to the fare provided, an acrobat entered the premises and proceeded for their edification to perform the most alarming tricks amongst the tables and chairs, until forcibly ejected by the owner. For a moment it seemed as if the affair would end in a row, but, evidently thinking better of it, the performer withdrew, shouting insults and shaking his fist.

"That's nothing," said the middy carelessly,

noting Percy's astonished looks. "I've seen blood spilt over less than that. It's a queer place Port Said, and they say that the scum of all nations come to live here. Now what shall we do? There's not much to see, but we may as well have a look round."

Haying paid their bill and bought several packets of Turkish delight, the two boys strolled through the streets, looking into the shop windows and gazing at the motley crowd of passers by. Beggars of all descriptions and nationalities abounded and pestered Percy for "coppers." They seemed to recognize instinctively that Hollands was an old hand at this game, and avoided him accordingly. The middy took his friend to the outskirts of the town, and together they watched the string of camels coming in over the sands.

"It's nearly four o'clock," remarked Hollands at last, looking at his watch, "and I'm feeling very peckish. What do you say to a cup of tea before we go aboard? I'm tired of looking at these silly camels, and the sand gets into my throat and eyes."

"All right," assented Percy somewhat reluctantly. "I suppose it's time we were going, but I'm not half tired yet of looking at these

Arabs. It's the first real touch of the East to me, you know, though you've seen it all before."

As they turned to retrace their steps, a European came out of a little mosque close at hand. "Why, it's Richellmann!" exclaimed Hollands. "I wonder what the beggar has been doing with himself."

Somewhat to their surprise—for hitherto the Dutchman had rather avoided their company—Richellmann approached, evidently desiring to speak to them.

"Goot day," he began, lifting his hat politely. "Port Said is an interesting town, is it not?"

"It is," replied Hollands, with a sweeping bow, "most interesting. We have seen twenty coal barges, fifty dirty beggars, and about ninety camels. Altogether it has been a lively and exciting experience."

The Dutchman shot a glance at the speaker and then burst into a loud laugh.

"Ha! ha!" he cried, as though enjoying the joke immensely, "you make what you call fun at me, is it not? But there are other things to see besides coal boats and camels, and I haf been into the mosque there, and you should visit it before you leave."

"Oh, I should like to see a mosque," said Percy eagerly, looking at Hollands, who nodded carelessly.

"All right, we may as well look into it now we're here. Thanks for mentioning it. We'll have to hurry, though."

The Dutchman accompanied them to the entrance, explaining that they would have to take off their shoes according to Moslem etiquette; but at the door he halted and spoke some words in Arabic to the attendant who came at his call.

With another polite bow and a twinkle in his eye as he looked at Hollands, he was gone, leaving the two boys hesitating on the threshold.

"Bother his impudence!" said Hollands, gazing after him. "Does he think we're kids, unable to look after ourselves? He seems to fancy there's a joke somewhere, but I'm blessed if I can see it."

"Do you think we're cutting it too fine?" asked Percy, pausing in the act of kicking off his shoes.

"Not a bit," replied the middy, thrusting his feet into the slippers the attendant placed before him; "I'm going to see through this blessed mosque now we're here."

He signed to the Arab to lead on, and the man preceded them along a narrow passage for some little distance to a door which, being unlocked, opened on to a small back courtyard.

"This seems rather a rum entrance to a church, doesn't it?" said Hollands in surprise. "The fellow must surely have made some mistake. Hi! you! We want to see the mosque."

"Mosque, yes," the attendant nodded, motioning across the courtyard and pointing to another door.

"Come on, then, and hurry up," replied the middy impatiently; "we've no time to lose."

The man unlocked the door, and led the way down another winding passage badly lighted by occasional loopholes. Just as Percy was remarking that he thought it was wiser to return to the ship, the Arab stopped before another door, unlocked it, and motioned to the boys to step inside.

"Mosque," he repeated.

"High time too," grunted Hollands, stepping forward gingerly, followed by Percy. "Why, the place is in pitch darkness."

He turned to address the attendant and gave a warning shout.

“Look out!”

The door was suddenly slammed to, and the key grated in the lock just as Hollands flung himself against it.

“Trapped!” he exclaimed wrathfully.

“Trapped, by all that’s unpleasant! I understand the Dutchman’s joke now!”

## CHAPTER IV.

### A RACE FOR THE BOAT.

“TRAPPED!” echoed Percy in dismay.

“Do you think they mean to keep us locked in here? What on earth is the meaning of it?”

“I don’t know,” replied Hollands, rattling the door again in vain, “but we’ll see presently. If it’s robbery, some one will be here directly offering to let us out for a certain price, and pointing out that the *Caledonia* is due to sail immediately. If it isn’t robbery it may be—something else. I wish it wasn’t so dark. Have you any matches?”

“Yes, a box half full,” answered Percy, after feeling his pockets.

“Same here. That’s good. Let’s have a look round and see where we are. Move carefully. There may be some hole or trap in the floor.”

The middy struck a match and, holding it up, proceeded to survey the surroundings.

"Why, it's quite a small room!" he exclaimed—"not a mosque at all. Stand here while I work round, and shout if I lose my bearings."

He moved off cautiously, feeling his way against the walls, and after an interval, which seemed ages to Percy, he came back to his original starting-point.

"Found nothing," he stated laconically. "Just a small room—square as far as I can make out; and this is the only door."

"Perhaps we can force it," suggested Percy, "if we both shove against it."

"No use, I'm afraid," said Hollands. "It opens inwards, and there is no handle to give us a purchase. However, we'll try. Are you ready? Now!"

Again and again they flung themselves against the door, which creaked and rattled under their combined efforts, but at length they were forced to desist, panting and breathless.

"This is beastly," said Percy; "the boat will be off if we don't get out at once. Perhaps some one will hear us if we shout. Hi! Hullo!"

Together and separately they continued to call for several minutes, their cries echoing through the room, but no one answered, and when they ceased the silence seemed more heavy and oppressive than before.

"It's no go," said Hollands, after a renewed attempt—"just a waste of breath. We'll have to find a way out ourselves. If it wasn't for the *Caledonia* it would be rather a lark. I'll bet Richellmann is at the bottom of this. Has he any grudge against you?"

"None whatever," replied Percy emphatically. "I never set eyes on him before this voyage. Why do you think he has anything to do with this?"

"I don't know, only it was he who wanted us to look at the beastly mosque, and he seemed to know that Arab scoundrel who tricked us. He spoke to him in Arabic, you remember, and then warned us not to be late."

"So he did, but——"

"Oh, never mind now," said the middy. "I'm going to get out of this and be even with him somehow. Wait here till I have another look round the walls."

He moved off again, striking matches and sounding the walls as he went. When about

half-way round Percy heard him give a sudden exclamation.

"Come here!" he cried excitedly, after a moment's pause. "I believe I've found a way out. Come round by the walls."

Moving cautiously, Percy did as he was told, and presently found himself beside his friend.

"What is it?" he inquired eagerly. "What have you found?"

"I don't know for certain," was Hollands's reply; "but I think I've hit on a doorway that has been filled up. Look at this."

He struck a match as he spoke, and waiting until it was well alight, passed it slowly along the face of the wall. Suddenly it flickered, and would have gone out if the middy had not protected the flame. A second trial yielded a similar result, the draught if anything being more pronounced.

"Now listen to this, Alden."

Hollands thumped with his fists on the wall, which gave out the dull sound of solid masonry; but as his hand moved forward past the spot where the match had flickered, the percussion changed to a thin, hollow sound.

"There's a cavity there or I'm a mug," said

the middy. "Now, then, wait till I get my knife out, then strike a match and test it as I did, and when it flickers I'll dig a hole in the plaster and try and locate the joint in the brick-work. Once we do that it shouldn't take long to haul out one of the bricks. Having been built in, the bricks can't be 'bonded,' or whatever they call it, with the rest of the wall. Now, then."

Trembling with excitement, Percy did as he was bid, and after two or three attempts Hollands uttered a cry of triumph.

"Got it!" he shouted. "See here!"

His knife disappeared up to the hilt, and, pulling it downward, it cut a straight line through the plaster, revealing the joint in the brickwork.

"More matches! Strike half a dozen at once, and when I've got the plaster off one brick I'll manage the rest in the dark."

Without much difficulty this preliminary step was accomplished; and then Hollands set to work loosening the brick thus exposed. He worked with a will; but the task was not easy, and the pocket-knife was soon blunted and broken. At length he paused.

"You have a go," he said savagely. "It's

coming right enough, but the skin is chipped off my knuckles, and my hand's numb."

"Right," was Percy's response, as he gripped the knife and commenced hacking at the cement. Bit by bit the brick loosened, till at last, in response to a vigorous push, it was forced outwards, and fell with a thud on the earth outside. Panting with their exertions, the lads paused a moment, listening for any signs of alarm; but none came, and they began with feverish energy to enlarge the hole already made. One by one the bricks loosened and fell, and as the gap widened the cool evening air fanned their faces and invited further efforts.

"By Jove! it's quite dark outside," said Percy, pausing an instant. "There are stars in the sky. We have surely been here for several hours. The *Caledonia* must have sailed."

"Never say die," responded Hollands cheerfully. "We're almost through. A long pull and a strong pull, and over she goes."

Undermined by their determined assaults, a large portion of the brickwork gave way suddenly without warning. There was a cry of "Look out!" from Hollands, a sudden leap backwards, followed by a loud crash as the

wall fell inwards, carrying the two boys to the floor. Bewildered and dazed by the unexpected occurrence, Percy lay for a moment, unable to realize the position till a husky inquiry from somewhere close at hand brought him to his senses.

“Are you hurt?”

“N-o, I don’t think so. Are you?”

“Not a bit. Hurrah!” shouted the middy, jumping up, choking and coughing amidst the dust. “We’re free at last. Come on—quick! There’s some one coming.”

Voice raised in alarm were distinctly audible, and the sound of feet pattering down the passage. Not a moment was to be lost. Head foremost, the middy flung himself through the gap in the brickwork. Percy followed suit as the door was thrown open, and some one rushed across the room.

“Quick!” whispered Hollands, pulling Alden to his feet. “This way.”

He darted off to the right as he spoke, down a lane, dodged across a byway, and never halted until several hundred yards lay between the fugitives and their pursuers.

“We’re all right now,” he panted; “wouldn’t dare to lay hands on us openly. Only wish we’d

time to go and kick up a row with the Consul. Come on. This way to the dock ; and won't old Dutchy be pleased to see us ! ”

Covered with dust and in stocking soles, for the slippers donned at the “ mosque ” had been left behind, the two English lads aroused no little curiosity as they dashed down the well-lighted main street leading to the docks. Brushing past a crowd of natives, Percy peered out over the harbour, endeavouring vainly to locate their ship amidst the crowd of boats at anchor.

“ I’m sure that’s her after all,” he called eagerly to his friend, pointing to a large two funnelled steamer. “ Let’s get a boat.”

“ No go,” responded Hollands shortly ; “ she’s away. That’s a Messagerie Maritime liner in her moorings.”

“ Gone ! ” echoed Percy in dismay. “ What the dickens are we to do ? ”

“ Wait for the next P. and O., I suppose. It’s a beastly nuisance, and I’ll get no end of a wigging ; but—hold on ! There’s a chance yet.”

“ Where ? How ? ”

“ The railway to Ismailia. We may——”

“ If you boys opine to catch the next train,” interrupted a tall man, evidently an American

by his accent, who had strolled up, "I guess you'll have to get a hustle on—slick. She leaves at 6.45, and it's 6.40 now."

"Thanks. We'll try it. Which way?" asked Hollands.

"Straight down past the post office, first turning to the right. Luck!"

Almost before the words were out of his mouth the boys were off. An Arab who got in the way was flung unceremoniously aside, and, followed by a jeering, chattering mob, the English lads took to their heels once more. Weary and footsore though he was, Percy set a scorching pace, and the middy followed doggedly. Past the brilliantly lighted post office, to the right, and the station came in view. A warning whistle from the engine, a last desperate spurt, and Alden flung himself into a carriage, turning just in time to drag Hollands after him as the train sped out of the station.

"Thanks!" gasped the middy. "We've done it. Whew, I'm blown. What a chap you are to run."

"My socks are in ribbons, and my feet all cut," said Percy ruefully; "but if we catch the *Caledonia* I don't mind. We've had a great time."

" Oh, we'll catch the old *Caledonia* all right," replied Hollands confidently. " These big boats are only allowed to crawl through the canal at a snail's pace, in case their ' wash ' should bring down the banks on both sides. We should be into Ismailia half an hour before our ship. Here's the conductor for our tickets. By Jove ! I'm almost cleaned out. Have you any money on you ? "

Luckily Percy had enough to secure tickets for himself and his friend to Ismailia, though the conductor was evidently suspicious of their bootless and dishevelled appearance, and carefully tested every coin to make sure that he was not being cheated. Hollands settled himself down for a snooze, but Alden, footsore and weary as he was, sat gazing out into the night. It was with difficulty that he could persuade himself that the happenings of the last few hours had been real and not imaginary. Was it possible ? Was it he, Percy Alden, who was sitting, barefooted and wondering, in a train tearing along by the side of the Suez Canal ? Had he dreamt of being shut up in a mosque with his friend, and would he wake up presently and find himself in his berth on board the *Caledonia* ? He thrust his head out of the

window, and the warm air fanned his cheeks. Certainly the illusion (if it were one) was very vivid. Ever and anon the lights from the train shone on banks of sand, and glistened on the surface of a belt of water running alongside. Far back the sky seemed lurid with the lights of a town which must be Port Said. The engine whistled, and he turned his head and drew back with a startled cry as a blinding glare flashed into his face and completely dazed him.

"Hullo ! what's up ?" exclaimed Hollands, starting to his feet and rubbing his eyes sleepily.

"A flash of lightning, I think," faltered Percy.

"Lightning ?" queried the middy, looking out. "Nonsense. That's the searchlight on a steamer making for Port Said. We'll be past her directly."

"A searchlight ? Why, of course it is," replied Percy, laughing. "What an ass I am ! My word ! it's a big ship too."

Smoothly, almost silently, the beat of her screw being lost amidst the rattle of the train, the liner glided by, her brilliantly lighted decks showing up for an instant, and then disappearing into the gloom of the night.

"P. and O. English mail homeward bound," remarked Hollands laconically. "I'm awfully

hungry. Fancy that beast Richellmann tucking into his dinner!"

"What are we to do when we get aboard again?" asked Percy. "Report him to the captain?"

"Richellmann? No use, I'm afraid. We've no proof that he had a hand in the business. No; he's been too clever for us, and all we can do is to lie low and let him laugh at us. I shan't forget it, all the same, and if I ever get a chance to be even with him—Look, there's another liner. We're overhauling her, and will be past directly."

The middy's trained eye had picked out the ship a long distance off, while all that Percy could see was a faint light where her search-light threw a patch of brightness far ahead. Together the boys watched with interest while ship after ship was passed; but at length the canal took a bend away from the railway line, and nought was left to view but the expanse of sand picked out by the lights of the train. At last the pace slackened, the brakes grated on the wheels, and the train clanked slowly into an ill-lighted station.

"Ismilia. Come on, Percy," cried Hollands.

" Tickets, tickets," said a half-caste porter, barring the way.

" Right. There you are. Has the outward bound English mail passed yet ? "

" Not passed yet. It come in one, two hour."

" Hurrah ! We've pulled it off !" shouted the middy, capering about until painfully reminded of the condition of his feet. " Next thing to do," he went on more soberly, " is to get something to eat."

Leaving the station, the two lads speedily found themselves at the little harbour, and alongside the pier they saw a small tug lying.

" I'll bet that tug's going off to the *Caledonia*," said Hollands. " There are always a few passengers for Ismailia, and the liners heave to in the canal. If we're in luck we may get some grub. There's a light in the cabin."

Jumping nimbly on deck, he advanced to the companion-ladder and disappeared. The sound of voices followed, and presently he reappeared and called to Alden.

" Come aboard, man. It's just as I thought. The tug takes the passengers from the liner, and her ' old man ' has offered us a meal of sorts. Put your foot here. Now, jump. There you are."

He led the way below as he spoke to a tiny cabin, where the red-faced captain, a Scotsman, was sitting at his evening meal.

"Come awa', laddies; come awa' and hae some tea," he said heartily. "Ye maun be fair famished, I'm thinking."

"We're pretty peckish, certainly," was the middy's response as he seated himself at the table and proceeded to cut a huge slice of bread, "and I don't suppose we'll get any supper on the *Caledonia*."

"Ye will not," replied Macpherson. "It's a grand line the P. and O.; but they're no so lavish with their victuals as they might be. Help yourself, sir."

"Thanks; I'm doing very well," said Alden, gulping down his tea.

"And so ye've been having a bit scrape in Port Said," went on the old man. "It's an awfu' place yon, and ye're weel oot o't. A wicked place."

His hunger somewhat appeased, the middy proceeded to give an account of their adventures, stating his conviction that the Dutchman had a hand in the affair.

"It appears verra like it," commented the Scotsman when he concluded; "but ye've

nae proof, ye see, and the least said is soonest mended. Never let on what keepit ye, and he'll no be able tae turn the laugh on ye. Richellmann, Richellmann," he went on musingly. "I dinna mind the name. There was a foreign chap they ca'ed the ' Flying Dutchman,' who used tae ' gun-run ' at the time o' the Soudan war ; but he's the only Dutchman I've met hereabouts."

"Richellmann's a great big burly chap, with bushy eyebrows, and wears green specs," remarked Hollands.

"Aweel, it's no the same chap," said Macpherson, "for the ' Flying Dutchman ' was big, but he had nae eyebrows ava. There's my hands coming aboard now. The *Caledonia* must be signalled."

As he rose from his seat three men came alongside, and, with a word to Macpherson, proceeded to cast off the moorings. A few minutes later the engines began to throb, and the old launch kicked her way out of the harbour. In spite of their protests, the skipper refused to take any recompense for his hospitality, even though Hollands pressed him to accept his watch as a memento.

"Na, na, laddie," he remarked. "What for  
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would old Sandy Macpherson wear a gold watch? Ye're kindly welcome to all ye've had for yer ain sakes and the sake of the old country."

From this attitude he refused to budge, despite the boy's entreaties, and at last they had to rest content with forcing upon him an old pocket-knife as a souvenir. This, he remarked, would be "uncommon handy" for cutting tobacco.

As they neared the liner they shook hands with their genial host, and prepared to slip on board as quietly as possible. Luckily for them, the hour being so late, there were few passengers on deck besides the handful that were going ashore, and their friends who were busily engaged saying farewell. When the ladder was let down the two lads slipped up unnoticed amongst the men carrying the mails, and in the bustle and confusion managed to gain their cabin unobserved. Richellmann, as usual, was still in the smoking-room playing cards, so they had the field to themselves.

"It will be a treat to see our friend's face when he discovers we're aboard after all," chuckled the middy as they hastily divested themselves of their clothes and jumped into

their bunks. "I'd like to give him a *tu quoque* for his dirty trick, but I'm too sleepy."

Percy's only reply was a grunt as he settled himself cosily amongst the bedclothes, and the "treat" Hollands had prophesied was not destined to be fulfilled. In a very short space of time both lads were fast asleep, and when Richellmann came below only their regular breathing betrayed their presence. Cautiously switching on the light, the big Dutchman surveyed his sleeping companions with a look of baffled malice that would have gone far to confirm the middy's suspicions had he seen it. Bending over the recumbent form of Percy Alden, he surveyed the lad's sleeping countenance thoughtfully. Then, stooping swiftly, he pushed a hand quickly under the pillow, being careful not to disturb the sleeper. Apparently his search was fruitless, and, withdrawing his hand, he stood an instant irresolute. A movement in Hollands's bunk caused him to look round suddenly. A glance reassured him ; but convinced, evidently, that further action would be inopportune, with a muttered curse he proceeded to undress and prepare himself for sleep.

## CHAPTER V.

ARRIVAL AT PENANG—A MIDNIGHT VISITOR.

WHEN the steward entered the cabin next morning our two friends woke to find that the good ship *Caledonia* was lying off Suez, surrounded by a small fleet of little boats laden with fruit.

“ Heigh-ho ! ” yawned Percy, stretching himself lazily. “ I am sleepy. Bother the steward. Why couldn’t he leave us alone ? ”

“ Dunno,” grunted Hollands. “ It’s just a way they have. However, now we’re awake, we may as well get up and buy some fruit.”

He jumped out of his berth as he spoke, and then, remembering that they were not alone, turned and looked at the Dutchman’s bunk.

“ He’s still asleep,” he whispered cautiously. “ Let’s play him a trick to pay him off.”

“ How ? ”

"I don't know. Ah, yes. That's the ticket. We'll hide his green spectacles. The beggar's as blind as a bat, I expect, and won't be able to see a yard without them."

Quick as thought the speaker seized the glasses lying on the dressing-table, and was about to stuff them under his bunk when he was arrested by the voice of the Dutchman.

"I will trouble you for my spectacles, if you please," he said unexpectedly.

"Oh, good morning, Mr. Richellmann," replied the middy coolly. "Your spectacles? Certainly. Here they are, though how you can see through them I can't make out."

"It is for weakness," answered the Dutchman hastily, adjusting the green glasses. "Mine eyes they are not strong."

Not a word passed as to the boys' absence on the previous day, the subject being tacitly avoided. Later on several of the passengers asked questions as to their disappearance ; but Hollands, by his careless answers and mysterious manner, managed to convey the impression that the two had been up to some spree.

Partly to disarm suspicion, the middy promptly proceeded to organize the usual series of sports and competitions, and soon

all were busy practising buckets, deck quoits, and other games, discussion on all other subjects being excluded for the time being. During the steam down the Red Sea the heat prevented more strenuous pursuits ; but once past Perim, activity was renewed. The *Caledonia* reached Aden at night, and Percy, therefore, was unable to undertake the usual pilgrimage to the tanks, though his friend assured him that he missed very little by this misfortune. A few passengers transhipped for Bombay, but the majority remained, and the sports were continued during the sail across the Indian Ocean. Percy won the hundred yards sprint, carried out along the first-class main deck, and Hollands easily secured the obstacle race, showing extraordinary agility and resource in negotiating the sail cloth, barrels, and other obstructions. By the time Colombo was reached a general feeling of regret prevailed at the forthcoming and inevitable breaking up of the company, and Percy could hardly believe that his many friendships were only of some three weeks' standing. He was the recipient of many little gifts and souvenirs, and almost the only one who did not wish him good luck and prosperity was Richellmann.

"So! We part to-morrow," said the Dutchman phlegmatically as they found themselves together in the cabin packing their trunks. "I go ashore here; our friend goes on to Australia; and you—you go to Penang. Is it not so?"

"Yes, I'm going to visit my father."

"The Herr Resident? Well, we will meet again," remarked Richellmann, with a peculiar emphasis which somewhat impressed Alden.

"I've no desire to see the fellow again," he confided to Hollands; "but he spoke as if we were sure to encounter one another before long."

"Wretch," replied the middy laconically. "I only hope I'll come across him in a business way; but nowadays there's not much chance of that, worse luck!"

"No, the Dutch Navy will hardly take you on nowadays," laughed Percy; "and in any case you wouldn't expect to find a naturalist on your opponent's quarter-deck, would you?"

"Oh, I didn't mean that exactly. A man-of-war would be the very last place I would expect to find the beggar. A pirate or slave dhow would be much more like the mark. Did you notice how he glared at me the other morn-

ing when I was going to hide his spectacles ? The man can see as well as you or I, and it's my belief he's a wrong un."

" Perhaps you're right," was Percy's reply. " Certainly Richellmann has not made many friends on board, but then he has kept very much to himself. However, after to-day we shall probably never see him again. I only hope it won't be the same with you."

" No fear," said Hollands, linking his arm affectionately in his friend's. " I'll keep you posted in our movements, and expect you to do your duty in return. By the way, what is your address in Penang ? "

" The Residency."

" That all ? Sounds well, doesn't it ? The Right Honourable Sir Percy Alden, K.C.M.G., etc., the Residency, Penang. You'll be too high and mighty to correspond with a humble middy like myself."

With such chaff the two lads endeavoured to keep up an assumption of gaiety as the ship rapidly approached the harbour and the hour of parting drew near. Truth to tell, both keenly regretted the coming separation, and it was with mingled feelings they watched the liner's entrance to the harbour and the dropping

of the anchor. The *Ballarat*, Percy's boat, was waiting, ready to leave, and the eastward bound passengers from the *Caledonia* were only given two hours for the transference of themselves and their luggage. A tug came alongside, and the process of disembarkation began at once amidst the usual scene of bustle and confusion. Good-byes were exchanged for the hundredth time, and with a last cheer the tug put off for the smaller ship. Hollands insisted on accompanying his friend, and stayed till the last minute, eventually scrambling down the ladder into a catamaran. As the *Ballarat* slowly gathered way and headed for the open sea he stood up and waved his hat in farewell. As long as he remained in sight Alden hung over the stern waving in reply; but at length the breakwater intervened, and the little boat disappeared from view.

Sad and depressed, he went below to inspect his new cabin, and it was not until he had eaten a hearty dinner and been chaffed unmercifully by some of the officers about leaving his heart behind in the *Caledonia* that he recovered some of his wonted cheerfulness.

After all, the five days aboard the *Ballarat* passed very pleasantly, and though he missed his

friend the middy, there were plenty of amusements to occupy his attention. The weather continuing fine, cricket matches were of daily occurrence, and afforded an outlet for his suppressed energy. The captain and officers were a cheery, sociable lot, and initiated him into the mysteries of taking "the meridian" and "logging the course." One of the ladies, wife of a doctor in Singapore, gave him lessons in Malay, which proved exceedingly diverting both for pupil and teacher.

On the morning of the fifth day Percy was awakened by the slowing of the engines and the scurry of feet overhead. Hurrying on deck he found the captain, oilskins over pyjamas, himself superintending affairs on the bridge. A dense mist shrouded the ship on all sides, and to the landsman it appeared as though they were stationary. Weird sounds filtered through the moist, impenetrable pall. A bell rang, and the screw suddenly thrashed the water. An order was given, chains rattled, and the anchor dropped with a heavy splash. The captain, with a last look around, descended from the bridge, and coming up to Percy slapped him on the shoulder.

"Wondering where we are, eh?" he laughed,

noting the lad's look of bewilderment. " Well, to let you into the secret, we're—in Penang harbour. Keep your eyes open, and in a few minutes you'll see one of the most beautiful sights in the East. Now I must be off to shave and dress."

He rolled away, his bare feet pattering on the damp deck, and presently one of the junior officers appeared to take his place.

" Hullo, Alden," he exclaimed, coming forward. " The 'old man' told me to take you up on the bridge to see the sun rise. Come along, the mist is growing thinner every minute."

He led the way as he spoke, and from their elevated station on the bridge they presently witnessed an exhibition of nature's glories which stamped itself indelibly on the mind of one at least of the spectators. A cool, gentle breeze had risen and was pushing back the mist, driving it hither and thither in fantastic wreaths. Close by, the stern of another large liner (a British-India boat, the officer declared) could be described, and farther forward the outline of a handsome yacht. A moment later the whole extent of the harbour lay unfolded, dotted with innumerable small craft and stirred to life by the coming dawn. A ray of sunshine

pierced the retreating mist, revealing a line of white buildings lining the quay, and next instant the sun rose in all the beauty and variance of an Eastern dawn. As if by magic the mist disappeared, leaving in its stead the rich, olive colouring of a tropical island, dominated by the great hill in the background, over 2,000 feet in height. Sheer from the still blue waters of the bay it seemed to rise towering and majestic in its might and grandeur.

Entranced and silent Alden watched the panorama unfolding before his eyes, forgetful of everything but the beauty of the scene, until his companion's voice recalled him to the present.

"Pretty, isn't it?" he remarked in the careless tone of one accustomed to such sights. "See that big white building over there near the foot of the hill? That's the Residency, where your father lives."

Percy gazed with renewed interest at the house which was to be his home, and which, in the still clear air, looked close at hand instead of three miles distant. His companion pointed out several other buildings, and was drawing his attention to the flat expanse of the Malay States lying on the other side, when a bugle note rose sharp and distinct

"From the Sikh lines," the officer explained, looking at his watch. "By Jove, it's past six. You'd better cut along and jump into your togs before the ladies come on deck."

Excited at the prospect of meeting his father so soon, Percy hurried below and made a hasty toilet. Breakfast was a scrambling meal, for already sampans were alongside to take the passengers ashore, and every one was in more or less of a hurry. The *Ballarat* was sailing for Singapore at three in the afternoon, and newcomers to the East were anxious to land and look around. Percy, having ascertained that his heavy luggage was all safe, proceeded to say farewell to those still on board. He had just completed the round and had called a sampan for himself and another for his goods, when the captain stepped out of his cabin.

"Oh, Captain Royston," exclaimed Alden, "I'm so glad you've come. I wanted to say good-bye and thank you for all your kindness."

"Good-bye, good-bye," said the captain, shaking hands heartily; "we'll all miss you very much. But what's the hurry? A launch will be sure to come for you shortly if you wait."

"I think my father would like me to find

my own way," replied Percy hastily; "and, besides, I do want to try one of these funny-looking sampans."

The captain laughed, clapping him on the shoulder.

"That's right, my boy, always stand on your own feet. From what I know of your father, I feel sure he would agree with you. Give him my best respects. Good-bye."

With a parting handshake Percy ran down the ladder and jumped into the sampan, ordering the Kling boatman in his best Malay to take him ashore. The distance was short, and presently the little boat grounded on the beach, the sampan with the boxes following suit a minute or two later. Percy immediately found himself surrounded by a crowd of natives jabbering at the top of their voices and making free with his boxes. The two boatmen also clung to him, demanding their fare, and refusing to be comforted until each had received a dollar—in reality a sum far exceeding their expectations. With some difficulty and not a little force, the English lad extricated himself from the turmoil, and, engaging a hand-barrow, had his luggage transferred. Then ordering the Kling to proceed

to the Residency he set off in the direction indicated, escorted for some distance by the disappointed candidates. These soon dropped behind, and by the time the "Maidan," or recreation ground, was reached the last had departed to seek another victim. Percy gazed about him with interest, noting that they passed the town on their left and struck off towards the Hill. The road was broad and well kept, with picturesque houses on each side surrounded by patches of gardens with banana and cocoa-nut trees. For quite half an hour they trudged along, and Percy began to fear that he had made some mistake; but still the Kling when questioned nodded his head and pointed in front. Gharries and rickshaws passed occasionally, the occupants gazing curiously at the sight of a white man walking alongside a barrow-load of luggage. At length they came abreast of a large whitewashed building, which Alden gathered from his guide was the hospital. A little farther on the road opened on a large space of grass where a company of Sikhs were drilling, with flags here and there plainly indicating a golf course. Half-way round this space an avenue led on to the road, and through the trees could be seen

glimpses of a palatial dwelling-house ; and from the Kling's gesticulations Percy understood that they had reached their destination at last. As he turned in at the avenue a tall figure in white appeared in the porch, and with a shout of joy Percy rushed forward and flung himself into the outstretched arms.

“ Father ! ”

“ Percy ! My dear boy ! How you have grown. I can hardly believe my eyes. Come away in and have some tiffin.”

“ My luggage——”

“ Ah, yes, I had forgotten ; ” and, turning to the waiting Kling, Mr. Alden gave him some rapid orders in Malay. Then, linking his arm in his son’s, he drew him affectionately through the large hall into the dining-room.

“ Now let me have all your news. We have a long period of time to cover. Let me see, it must be more than three years since I was last home, and you were quite a little chap then. Dear me, how the time flies ! ”

Something in his tone caused Percy to glance up quickly, and with the sure instinct of sympathy he knew that his father’s grief for his dead wife was fresh and poignant.

“ Yes, it seems no time since you left me at

the College," he answered, " and yet it seems ages since I saw you. But now we're together we'll have a jolly time, won't we, dad ? "

" I hope so, my boy, I hope so indeed. But now for your news. How did you leave your cousins in London ? "

Once launched, Percy kept up a continuous stream of conversation, and it was not until the Chinese boy had left the room that he realized how completely he had monopolized the talk.

" You must be tired of listening to me," he said apologetically when he had completed a glowing account of the voyage out ; " but everything has been so new and interesting that I seem able to go on for hours."

Mr. Alden smiled.

" I am glad to hear you say so," he answered, " and there is plenty of time to spare. I am going to take a day off in your honour, so you understand what is expected of you. Will you have a cigar ? No doubt you found quiet opportunities for a smoke at the College."

" Well, yes, we did occasionally," admitted Percy, colouring and glancing up half-doubtfully into his father's face ; " but really we were too keen on training to indulge much."

"I'm very glad to hear it," responded Mr. Alden, pushing the box across the table; "smoking is a very bad habit for growing boys, but now that you have left school you must form your own opinions. By the way, I have seen your friend Brinscombe several times. A fine, manly fellow."

"Isn't he?" assented Percy eagerly. "Cecil is a splendid chap and was an awfully good friend to me at school."

"And this young middy—Hollands, I think you called him?"

"A real good sort too, full of fun and mischief. I don't suppose I should have enjoyed the voyage half so well but for him."

"Probably not. Middies are generally a lively lot, but he seems to have got you into rather a scrape at Port Said."

"Oh, that—yes, we nearly lost the boat, but it was really just as much my fault as his; and after all there was no harm done."

"Perhaps not, but Port Said is not a pleasant place for adventures of that—or any sort," replied Mr. Alden, pulling thoughtfully at his cigar. "I don't quite understand it. What makes you suspect the Dutchman, Richellmann? Had he any grudge against either of you?"

"None, unless he had taken offence at some of Hollands's jokes, harmless though they were."

"Well, that is a possible explanation, of course, though unlikely. Now if you are ready I will show you your room, and you can have a rest till tea time. We generally lie down for an hour or two after tiffin."

Following his father, Percy passed up the broad staircase along a veranda to a large, airy room looking on to the golf course. Here he found his boxes already opened and a grave-faced Chinaman busily laying out his clothes.

"That is Swee Hin," said Mr. Alden, indicating the Celestial, "who will act as your boy while you are here. I chose him on purpose because he doesn't know a word of English. It will be capital practice for you picking up Malay."

Percy laughed.

"I've been having lessons already," he explained, "from Mrs. Norris on board ship."

"Mrs. Norris? Do you mean the wife of Dr. Norris, of Singapore?"

"Yes, she said her husband lived in Singapore; but I'm afraid she wasn't very proud of her pupil."

"Never mind. A smattering goes a long

way, and I'm very pleased to think you had the sense to learn a few words. Now, take my advice and have a nap. Swee Hin will call you in time for tea, and then we might have a drive. My room is next to this, and your bathroom is down that stair."

"Thanks, I'll manage all right. It *is* nice to be out here with you. I hope you will let me do some work for you, father."

"Well, well, we shall see," replied Mr. Alden, smiling at his enthusiasm. "It is a new experience for me having a grown-up son to look after."

He gave a parting order to the Chinaman, and went to his own room; and with a last look round to see that everything was in order, Swee Hin followed his example.

Tired and drowsy, Percy kicked off his shoes, and, stretching himself out on a long chair, soon fell fast asleep. A clock was striking four when he was roused by Swee Hin opening the shutters, which had been closed to keep out the fierce rays of the tropical sun. The boy proceeded to lay out a flannel suit, clean shoes, etc., and then, with the customary title of "Tuan," intimated that tea would be served in the front veranda. Proud of his ability to pick up the

sense of the Malay words, Percy dismissed the fellow with the equivalent for "Very well," feeling inches taller at the accomplishment of the feat. After a refreshing bath he joined his father over a cup of tea, and presently the carriage drew up to the door.

"Get your topee, and I'll take you for a drive and show you round a bit. We haven't much choice of roads, of course, being limited by the length and breadth of the island."

As they bowled along Percy kept up an incessant stream of questions, his curiosity being excited by the novel, and interesting sights that greeted them at every turn. Here a Kling was leisurely ploughing up the land with a huge, lazy buffalo attached to an antiquated plough; there a Chinaman was busily engaged tending what proved to be a crop of sugar cane. Groves of tall cocoa-nut trees lined the road, with native huts scattered broadcast, and an occasional temple dotted at intervals. They passed along the foot of the hill, and entered the famous gardens, visiting the miniature waterfall, and inspecting the reservoir containing the town's supply of water. Proceeding south-west, at length they reached the sea-coast, and, turning, headed

for the town, passing the Chinese cemetery, with its curious little grave-knolls. As they neared the town darkness fell suddenly, and the lights of hundreds of lamps lit up the scene as they drove down the main thoroughfare, round the old moated castle, and drew up at the band-stand on the recreation ground. Here, to Percy's unaccustomed eyes, the whole of the European population appeared to be gathered. Cricketers and lawn-tennis players were reluctantly abandoning their favourite games for the day; while rows of private carriages and gharries lined the drive, the lady occupants drinking in the cool sea air, and listening to the music. The Javanese band was playing the "*Merry Widow*" waltz, and, listening to the strains and the lap of the water on the beach, Percy found it hard to realize that it was indeed he who sat entranced nearly six thousand miles from Felton College and all the old associations of the past.

A tall, military-looking man came up to the carriage, and after a short conversation was introduced by Mr. Alden as Colonel Fell, of the Police. Percy, reminded of his chum, was about to inquire for Brinscombe, when his father, intimating that he would be back

shortly, stepped out of the carriage and strolled away with the Colonel. Left to himself, Percy watched the promenaders, and was amused at the looks of interest and curiosity directed towards the Resident's carriage. Two fine-stepping English horses attracted his attention, and as the landau swept past one of the occupants glanced round, and by a slight gesture appeared to make a movement of recognition.

"De Souza!" muttered Percy, half rising in his seat. "There, he's waving again. I do believe it was De Souza."

At the same moment Mr. Alden reappeared, and, jumping in, ordered Hassan the coachman to drive home. Absorbed and preoccupied, the Resident listened inattentively to his son's account of his meeting with his schoolfellow; but as they drew clear from the crowd he turned quickly, as if a name, more than once-repeated, had just caught his wandering attention.

"Eh, what's that you're saying? De Souza? What do you know of him?" he asked hastily.

"He was in the Fifteen with me at Felton," explained Percy. "I must have mentioned his name in my letters."

"Yes, yes, I remember now—you did. Rather singular that you should mention him just now. I hope you won't see much of him out here. Things are rather different in the East, you know, and—" He ended somewhat abruptly.

"He's not a *friend* of mine, if that's what you mean," replied Percy, rather puzzled at his father's tone. "I never cared much for the fellow, and, in fact, rather avoided him latterly, owing to an unpleasant quarrel."

"Indeed? You must tell me more about that later, and let me consider your relations. There, that's the club," he broke off, pointing out a large, brilliantly lighted house. "I must get your name put up, and introduce you to the members."

Later on, after dinner, when smoking in the veranda, Mr. Alden revived the subject of his son's acquaintance with De Souza, and drew from him the whole story of the final quarrel and estrangement.

"To this day I don't understand what it was all about," Percy concluded, "and probably De Souza has forgotten about it also."

"I don't know that," replied Mr. Alden thoughtfully. "These half-castes, or Eurasians,

are inclined to be vindictive, and brood over an injury, real or imaginary. In this case, from your account, pique in connection with the football match appears to have been at the bottom of the trouble. It was most unfortunate that Brinscombe lost that letter, and quite possibly De Souza still owes you a grudge on that account. However, my real reason for speaking about the matter is to warn you that colour prejudices are much stronger here than at home, and it wouldn't do for you to be constantly in the company of a Eurasian."

"But I don't want—" began Percy.

"So I understand after hearing your story," continued Mr. Alden, with a gesture of assent, "and it simplifies matters greatly. As a gentleman, I should be ashamed to see you slight any one with whom you had been on friendly terms at school, Eurasian or otherwise; but looking to my position here as Resident, it would have been awkward—very awkward—to have had my son consorting with such people."

"Well, dad, you need have no fears about that," said Percy, laughing. "I never liked the chap, and don't intend to seek him out now and swear eternal friendship. All the

same, it seems hard lines that these Eurasians should be—should be——”

“ Ostracized ? Yes, it does ; but you will understand racial antipathies better when you have been longer out in the East. I may say that news reached me only to-night from Colonel Fell which illustrates what I am saying.”

The Resident rose, walked to the end of the veranda, took a quick glance-round, and then returned to his seat.

“ As you know,” he resumed in a low voice, “ Sumatra lies about two hundred and fifty miles to the west of this—roughly, twenty-four hours distant. The natives in the northern portion, in Acheen, are always giving trouble, and lately there has been some rather severe fighting. The Dutch authorities complain that they are supplied with arms manufactured in Birmingham, and international complications are threatened. I am not going to say further at present, and don’t wish you to repeat a word of this conversation ; but Eurasians, either here or at Singapore, are suspected of this ‘ gun-running,’ as it is called. You will see, therefore, why I wished to make sure of your attitude with regard to De Souza.”

"Gun-running ! How exciting !" exclaimed Percy eagerly. "Will you catch them, do you think ?"

"I hope so," replied his father, smiling. "But it is not advisable to talk quite so loudly about it. Not that I wish to insinuate that there is much chance of any one interested overhearing our conversation," he continued quickly, as he noticed Percy's crestfallen look, "but it is safer to err on the right side. What about bed ? You have had a long day, and it is nearly eleven o'clock."

Having seen that everything was comfortable, and shown how the mosquito curtains should be arranged, Mr. Alden bade his son good-night, and retired to his own room. Tired out and sleepy, Percy was soon in bed, and shortly afterwards was dreaming of an exciting chase after a sampan loaded with cannon. How long he had been asleep he could not have told when he awoke to find the moonlight streaming in through the shutters, and, glancing at his watch, discovered that it was only one o'clock. Turning over on his side, he was in the act of composing himself for another spell of sleep, when his attention was arrested by the creaking of a door. Was his father up and

moving? No, the sound, though slight, came from his own bathroom, he felt certain; and with tingling nerves he lay alert, listening for what might follow. Creak, creak—the sound of a door gently closed, and then silence. If an intruder had gained an entrance he must inevitably appear at the top of the bathroom stairs, and on this spot, bathed in the bright moonlight, Percy fixed his fascinated gaze. The minutes passed, and no one appeared. In the dead silence even the stealthiest footstep would betray itself, and the thumping of his own heart was all that the lad could distinguish. Gathering courage, he opened the curtains and quietly rose from his bed. Should he call his father? The thought flashed through his mind, and was instantly dismissed. He had longed for adventures, and here was one presented to him, and—he was afraid! The thought of his own cowardice acted as a spur, and, taking his pluck in both hands, he resolved to see the thing to a finish. Cautiously striking a match, he lighted the hand lamp, and, creeping to the head of the stairs, flashed the light below, revealing—nothing. Greatly reassured, he stole softly down and tested the door. Ah! he had

been right—it was ajar. Peering out, he viewed the quiet garden flooded with moonlight, but not a figure stirred. Refastening the latch, he returned to his room somewhat mystified. Had he been dreaming? Now that he had seen for himself that no one was lurking below, ready to pounce on him, his fears vanished, and a sense of shame stole over him. How glad he felt that he had not yielded to his first impulse and called his father. After all, his fears had been groundless, though the door had certainly been opened—by a breath of wind, perhaps. However, it was closed now, and he had vindicated his courage. With a glowing sense of his bold action he jumped into bed, and soon fell fast asleep.

## CHAPTER VI.

### THE NEW SYCE.

PERCY was late in rising next morning, and, on entering the dining-room, found his father had almost finished breakfast.

"Good-morning," said the Resident, looking up with a good-natured twinkle in his eyes. "I see you are really in earnest about giving your poor old dad a helping hand with his correspondence. I'm just off to start work."

"Oh, I say! I am sorry," exclaimed Percy, regarding the tempting spread on the table with a rueful look. "Shall I come with you now?"

"No, no," replied his father, laughing. "I was only joking. I'm still quite fit to tackle my own work, thank goodness, and have no intention of spoiling your breakfast. I hope you slept well. Tea or coffee?"

"Tea, please," said Percy, sitting down.

"I slept like a top all night. Well, no—not quite, because——"

"Did the mosquitoes worry you?"

"No, it wasn't that. I woke about one, thinking I heard some one at my bathroom door." And Percy, having admitted so much, proceeded to relate his experiences of the previous night. "I hope you won't think me a silly ass," he concluded apologetically. "In daylight it all seems so different and absurd. No doubt the wind had blown open the door."

"No doubt, no doubt," rejoined his father thoughtfully, tapping the table, "though Swee Hin is usually very careful about locking the doors. Did you hear any other noise?"

"No, only the creaking of the door."

"Well, well," remarked the Resident, rising. "I'll speak to your boy about the matter. In the meantime you had better finish your breakfast, and then take a stroll around and see the grounds and stables. Have you kept up your riding at all?"

"Yes. Cecil Brinscombe and I used to go in for it regularly in summer."

"That is good. Amongst the other horses in the stable you will find a chestnut cob. I bought him a month ago in view of your arrival,

and when you know enough Malay to order a syce to saddle him for you, I shall formally hand him over."

"For my very own? Oh, how awfully good of you, dad," exclaimed Percy, jumping up in his excitement. "And you may as well give me the chestnut now, because that is one of the phrases I learnt from Mrs. Norris—'Syce, pakei kuda sama sayha.' "

"Bravo! The cob is yours. Now I must be off to my correspondence and interviews. Tiffin is at one o'clock, and I shall expect to see you then. If you go for a ride, Hassan, the head syce, will show you the way to the race-course, just past the hospital, and you can have a gallop there."

With such a prospect in store Percy did not linger over his breakfast; and having found his solar topee, he was soon out of doors on a voyage of discovery. As he passed the office he saw his father sitting at his desk talking to a superior-looking Chinese tradesman, or "towki," who, hat in hand, stood respectfully before him, while several other natives, Chinese and Klings, waited their turn. Pursuing his way, he strolled round the grounds, noting with satisfaction the well-kept tennis lawn, and

gazing with interest at the cocoa-nut, banana, and mangosteen trees laden with fruit. He found the stables at the back of the house, and, meeting Hassan at the entrance, received his salutation, and proceeded to inspect the horses. He fell in love immediately with the chestnut cob, and promptly named him "Kit," after the "Head's" daughter. Kit proved responsive to his advances, and Percy resolved then and there to try his paces. With Hassan's help the cob was speedily saddled, and, being led out, stood quietly while his new master mounted. Flinging up his heels, he gave vent to his spirits by playful bucks and jumps ; but Percy soon had him in hand, and trotted proudly past the office, waving his hand in farewell to his father. Once on the road, he turned to the right, till, reaching the hospital, he observed a small lane which landed him opposite the race-course. No sooner did Kit find himself on grass than he set off at full speed. Nothing loath, Percy gave him his head, and away they went thundering round the half-mile stretch. When the cob had worked off his exuberant spirits Percy set him at the low paling marking off the course, and to his delight the chestnut answered at once,

taking the jumps in faultless style and with evident relish. The increasing warmth of the sun gave warning at length of the passing hours, and, gaining the road, Percy cantered home well pleased with himself and his new mount. Handing Kit over to the attentions of the syce, he sought the house, and, after a refreshing bath and change, joined his father in the veranda.

"Well, Percy, how do you like the chestnut cob?" asked the latter, leaning back in his long chair. "You must have given him a long spell of work this morning."

"He just suits me down to the ground," answered Percy enthusiastically; "his action is delightful, and he jumps like a born hunter."

"So you have been putting him through his facings, eh? You are quite at liberty to use him as you wish, but remember that the heat soon tells on horses out here. What are you going to call him?"

"Kit, after Kitty Porchester, the Doctor's daughter."

"Ah ha! that's a great compliment to the young lady, isn't it?" exclaimed Mr. Alden, laughing. "However, it is a nice short name, and will suit admirably. By-the-bye, I have

been thinking over the account of your Port Said escapade, but can make nothing of it. What sort of a fellow was this Richellmann to look at ? ”

Percy described the Dutchman, and his father listened attentively, putting in a question now and again.

“ Wore coloured spectacles, did he ? For what reason ? ”

“ Weakness of the eyes. He mentioned the fact when he caught Hollands in the act of hiding the glasses.”

“ Then he wasn’t short-sighted ? ”

“ No, I don’t think so. His eyes were greenish and—and shifty, you know ; but he seemed to see all right.”

“ Greenish, were they ? ” repeated Mr. Alden quickly. “ Did you notice if he had any eyebrows ? ”

“ Any eyebrows ? Rather ! They were thick and shaggy, and black like his moustache.”

“ Thick and shaggy,” mused the Resident ; “ it is possible, of course——”

“ I say,” exclaimed Percy, suddenly, with a flash of recollection, “ Captain Macpherson at Ismailia spoke about some fellow, the ‘ Flying Dutchman ’ he called him, who had

no eyebrows. Are you thinking of the same man?"

"Yes, I am. Since Macpherson, whom I know well, spoke to you about him, I may as well admit that the 'Flying Dutchman' is the man whom I am trying to identify as your friend Richellmann."

"And he used to gun-run in the Soudan, too, Macpherson told us. How exciting! To think that he was in our cabin all the time and we suspected nothing."

"Hold on, you go a bit too fast," said the Resident gravely. "I never said it *was* the same man; only that the description was similar—bar the eyebrows. Your news, however, may be very important, and must be communicated to Colonel Fell."

"Do you think Richellmann is going to try his game out here?"

"I can't say that," continued Mr. Alden, "but Van der Kehding—that is the 'Flying Dutchman's' name—was wanted by the authorities at Singapore some years ago and disappeared mysteriously. There is the gong for tiffin. Come along; but, remember, I don't want you to breathe a word of this to a soul—not even to your friend Brinscombe."

Percy gave his promise, somewhat reluctantly, as he had looked forward to discussing the interesting situation with his friend Cecil ; but having pledged his word, such a proceeding was now impossible.

" Not that I wish to keep secret anything about your voyage out here," continued the Resident, when they were seated at tiffin, " far from it ! To make any mystery out of it would be the surest way to awaken suspicion. By all means tell Brinscombe anything you like about that, including the affair at Port Said."

" Oh, I see," responded Percy, brightening ; " I was afraid you wished me to keep quiet about all the fun I had with Hollands, and in that case I felt that my only safe plan was to avoid Cecil altogether ! "

He joined in the laugh at his own expense, and presently his attention was attracted elsewhere.

" Look, dad, there is Kit having a walk before going to his stall. Isn't he a beauty ? "

A syce passed the open doors of the dining-hall leading the cob by a halter, and Mr. Alden turned to look.

" Yes, he's a nice beast, and I hope will carry you well. That must be the new syce

Hassan was to engage for you. A strapping big fellow—a Malay type, I should fancy; but I don't altogether like his appearance."

"He looks fierce enough for anything, certainly," admitted Percy. "Atjeh, I think, is his name."

"I must find out where he comes from," remarked the Resident; and then, dismissing the subject, began to question Percy as to his plans for the evening. Finding that he had brought his golf clubs, he proposed a round after tea, suggesting a visit down town to see Brinscombe afterwards. This proposition was eagerly accepted, and having finished their lunch they retired for a rest.

After tea they strolled across to the club-house, and finding the course clear started on their round. Mr. Alden was of the steady order of golfer, his handicap allowance standing at 3, and Percy, in spite of his powerful driving, was unable to gain any advantage. What he gained in the long game he lost on the green, and time and again the Resident squared matters with long putts when the hole seemed lost. After a hard tussle the score stood all even and one to play, and in driving to the home hole Percy hit a tremendous ball which

pitched over the green and ran on to the road. Here he found himself in difficulties, and after several vain attempts was forced to give up the hole, and with it the game.

Quite a crowd had by this time collected round the first tee waiting their turn, and several men accosted Mr. Alden and were introduced to his son. Fred Bartram, the secretary, a young banker, eagerly sought permission to put up Percy's name for the club, and waxed enthusiastic over his driving.

"I never saw a longer shot on the links," he declared, referring to the last disastrous drive, "and I don't believe even Bassett, our local champion, could touch it."

"Oh, his driving's all right," remarked Mr. Alden, smiling, while Percy modestly disclaimed any special talent, "but the game's not finished till you're in the hole—eh, Percy?"

Nevertheless the Resident felt very pleased with his son's performance, and readily consented to his becoming a member of the club. He introduced Percy to some of the ladies in the club-house, and after some desultory conversation reminded him of his intended visit.

"I'm afraid it's rather late now, isn't it?"

said Percy doubtfully, looking at his watch. "It took me a good hour to get up here from the beach the other day, and I think you said Brinscombe lived close to the pier."

"So he does," replied Mr. Alden, laughing. "But I don't propose that you should walk; you'll find we don't go in much for that out here. Come along and I'll see you into a rickshaw."

In the road behind the club-house a long line of these conveyances stood in a row, with their brown, sturdy-limbed owners in attendance. At a sign from the Resident, as if galvanized into action, each made a grab for his rickshaw and dived towards his expected fare. Forming a semicircle round the two white men, they clamoured noisily for preference until, as if by magic, a little blue-coated, barefooted Malay policeman appeared and waved them back to their places. Obeying a gesture, one of the Chinamen, more favoured than his fellows, stepped forward, and laying the shafts of his rickshaw on the ground stood aside to allow Percy to mount.

"There you are. Jump in," said Mr. Alden, "but don't fling yourself into the seat or you may go over backwards. That's right. You

had better keep the fellow and I'll pay him off when you return. Remember dinner is at 7.30."

He gave some directions to the coolie, who stepped into his place, lifted the shafts, and set off at an easy trot. At first Percy felt decidedly uncomfortable in his novel position, being fearful of upsetting the equilibrium of the conveyance, but at length he grew accustomed to the sensation, and leaning back in his seat disposed himself more comfortably. He felt rather ashamed of being pulled along by another man, something after the manner of a child with its nurse, but gradually the feeling wore off as they passed rickshaw after rickshaw with their occupants; and he fell to marvelling at the Chinaman's wonderful endurance. Never once did he falter in his steady trot or drop to a walking pace. Clothed only in a dirty loin cloth, the well-developed muscles of his sturdy legs showed up hard and supple under his copper-coloured skin. Choosing the sea road, he sped along in the gathering gloom to the ceaseless accompaniment of the patter of his bare feet and the crunching of the light wheels. The road was new to Percy, but soon the blue waters of the

sea broke on his view and a cool breeze fanned his cheek. Presently they passed a large building with lights beginning to shine out, and hardly had he recognized it as the club when they swung to the left and found themselves opposite the Maidan. The click of balls against bats aroused old memories, and the English lad felt almost tempted to get down and join the cricketers at the nets. The bandstand was empty, but a few Europeans dressed in white were strolling about enjoying the cool evening breeze. The coolie turned to the right, swung into a short avenue, and, pulling up, deposited the shafts on the ground. Stepping gingerly out, Percy walked forward into the lighted veranda and announced to the white-robed Chinese boy who appeared that he wished to see Tuan Brinscombe. At the same moment a tall, well-known figure leapt out of a long chair in the far corner and rushed forward with a shout of welcome.

“Percy!”

“Cecil!”

“By Jove! I’m glad to see you, old chap. When did you arrive? But come in, come in: You’ll stay to dinner?”

“No, I’m afraid not. I promised the pater

I would be back by 7.30. Just tell my rickshaw coolie to wait for me, will you? I'm not fluent with the lingo yet."

Brinscombe did as requested, and then the two friends settled themselves into long chairs for a comfortable chat. Percy had to chronicle the life at Felton College after Cecil's departure, and then gave a graphic account of his adventures outward bound on the *Caledonia*.

"My word, the middy, Hollands, seems to have been a lively card," remarked Brinscombe, when his friend had finished. "It was like your luck to fall in with a jolly companion. What larks we might have had if only I had been the third in the cabin instead of that beastly Dutchman."

"Yes, old chap, that would have been ripping; but then, you see, I wouldn't have missed him for anything."

Brinscombe stared at his chum. "What on earth do you mean?" he asked. "I understood from what you said that the fellow was a perfect bounder."

"Oh—er, yes, of course," stammered Percy, who had been on the point of disclosing the secret he had promised to guard—"of course that is so; but then, you see," with

a sudden burst of inspiration, "if we hadn't met him we shouldn't have had any fun at Port Said."

"No, that is true," admitted Cecil reluctantly; "but all the same it would have been much jollier for me. We had dirty weather nearly the whole way, and consequently there was little opportunity for making friends with my fellow-passengers."

He gave a short account of his duties, explaining that at present he was taking the place of a Captain Turnbull who had been granted six months' sick leave. On the captain's return Cecil was to proceed to Amoy to learn Chinese, preparatory to passing his exam., and in the meantime he was picking up Malay and a smattering of law.

"I think I shall like the life first rate," he remarked in conclusion, "and there is such a lot of excitement and adventure. Twice I have gone along with inspectors to raid gambling dens, and the first time there was a splendid row. Knives were out, and for a moment or two it looked as if we were to be badly mauled; but the inspector bluffed the ringleaders into surrender, and saved the situation."

"It must be great sport," exclaimed Percy, with sparkling eyes.

"It is all that," assented his chum; "but occasionally we draw blank, as we did the other night. Everything was arranged to a nicety, and turned out exactly as planned, but all to no purpose. Some one had given information, and our birds had flown."

"How annoying! Is there much of that sort of thing?"

"Betrayal? Yes, a great deal. I believe some of the wealthier Chinese who own gambling dens give large sums for information of raids, and practically keep several native spies in the force."

A clock struck seven, and Percy rose hastily.

"Seven already! How the time has passed. Please ask your boy to call my rickshaw. I must be off."

Finding that he was really determined to go, Cecil gave the necessary instructions, and a minute later the patient coolie appeared at the door.

"Now look here," said Brinscombe as they shook hands, "I haven't half pumped you yet, and it's real mean of you to pay such a

shabby visit. Come and dine one day soon—say this day week. Will that suit?"

"Rather. I shall be delighted, and you must come up and see me whenever you have time. By-the-bye, I forgot to tell you I saw De Souza in his carriage the very evening I arrived."

"Did you? I've hardly set eyes on him since he came out. No word of his missing letter, I suppose?"

"Not a sign. I believe you must have torn it up with your other papers by mistake. Till next week then, old chap. Jalan."

The coolie bent to his work and the rickshaw swung into the road. The night was intensely dark, but at first the lights from the houses showed up the roadway. As they left the town behind the way grew darker, the waving branches of the trees throwing weird shadows across their path. Percy speedily lost all sense of the locality, and gave himself up to a pleasant thrill of the unknown. He pictured to himself vague danger lurking on every side, and recalled Cecil's description of his adventures. As the rickshaw turned a corner sharply two figures stepped aside hurriedly into the shade at the side, but not before the feeble light from the lamp revealed their forms.

Percy started from his dreamy reverie and glanced over his shoulder into the darkness.

"Surely that was Atjeh," he muttered to himself. "I wonder what he is doing there?"

The fierce aquiline features of the new syce had stood out unmistakably for a second; but already the shadowy figures were enveloped in the surrounding gloom, and further investigation was impossible. Presently the lights of the hospital appeared, and a few minutes later the rickshaw drew up in front of the Residency.

## CHAPTER VII.

### A CLUE.

MR. ALDEN carried out his promise of putting up his son's name in the club, and thereafter Percy found himself overwhelmed with invitations to all sorts of social and sporting engagements. Acting on his father's advice, he set aside two hours every day for study, and the remainder he found all too short for the purpose of enjoyment. Every morning before breakfast he went for a ride, being frequently joined by the Resident and Colonel and Mrs. Fell. He and Kit got to know each other perfectly, and the cob would whinny with delight whenever he heard his master's footsteps. Atjeh, the syce, remained taciturn and reserved, but appeared to get on well with the other natives, who, however, seemed to treat him with a certain amount of respect. Swee Hin, Percy's

Chinese boy, was the only one who made a companion of the syce, and the two were frequently to be seen hobnobbing together. A few days after his visit to Brinscombe, Percy was invited to play for the Penang cricket Eleven against a team of planters from Sumatra, and to his great delight he made top score in the match, and distinguished himself by his smart fielding. After the game Mr. Alden invited the rival elevens to dinner, and they spent a pleasant evening before dispersing at a late hour. Percy struck up a friendship with the visiting captain, Winter, and accepted his pressing invitation to go over and stay with him before returning to England.

"We haven't all the attractions you have in Penang," he remarked, as they strolled about the grounds waiting for their gharries to take them back to the hotel; "but you will be interested in seeing our tobacco and rubber plantations, and, if you're in luck, you may get a shot at a tiger."

"A tiger! I'd go anywhere to get a shot at a tiger!"

"Well, I hope you won't be disappointed," said Winter, laughing. "They are difficult to get at, but are very plentiful, and it is quite

on the cards that you may bag one. Hullo ! Who is that ? ”

“ Where ? Oh, that is my syce, Atjeh. A fierce-looking chap, isn’t he ? ”

“ He is that ; but where did you pick him up ? I had no idea there were any of his “ bangsa ” over here. Unless I am greatly mistaken, he is an Achinese.”

“ An Achinese ! ” repeated Percy, puzzled. “ What is that ? I didn’t know there was anything peculiar about him.”

“ Oh, probably not—out of Sumatra,” replied the other carelessly. “ But over there they are regarded very differently. A blood-thirsty, turbulent crew.”

“ Do they come from Sumatra ? ”

“ Yes, from the north, where they are constantly at war with the Dutch, and give no end of trouble. Don’t bring him with you when you come to pay me a visit.”

Further conversation was cut short by the arrival of the gharries, and in the confusion of leave-taking Percy forgot about Winter’s warning regarding the syce.

It was recalled to his memory some days later, however, when one of the other syces applied to the Resident for his discharge.

"A careless, useless fellow," Mr. Alden remarked, discussing the matter at tiffin, "and a thief into the bargain. Hassan says that he has been in the habit of selling the paddy for the horses, but it was the new syce—your man—that brought affairs to a climax."

"Atjeh? What did he do?"

"Caught the fellow in the act of stealing Kit's paddy, and went for him at once. If the others hadn't interfered, the thief would probably have been murdered. As it is, he is pretty badly bruised, and desperately anxious to put a safe distance between himself and Kit's protector."

"Well done, Atjeh," exclaimed Percy, laughing in spite of the serious view his father evidently took of the affair. "Well done indeed. I think any one who takes advantage of a dumb animal should be shot."

"You very nearly got your wish, then," replied Mr. Alden quietly, "and I am sure you do not yet realize how nearly a tragedy was averted. When the other syces appeared Atjeh was just about to knife his opponent."

"Whew! I say, that's going a little too far. That accounts for Winter's description of the man."

"Winter? Oh, you mean the captain of the Sumatra team. What does he know about the matter?"

"He happened to notice Atjeh when we were waiting for the gharries the other night, and expressed surprise at seeing him here. Said he came of a bloodthirsty stock. What was it he called him now? Oh, yes, I remember—an Achinese."

"An Achinese!" exclaimed the Resident. "By Jove! I never thought of that."

He rose quickly from his chair, and strode hurriedly up and down the room with a frown on his brow, evidently thinking deeply. Percy watched him in surprise, but kept silent, waiting for his father's explanations. After a few minutes the Resident paused, gazing thoughtfully out over the lawn, and then, resuming his seat, leant across the table.

"You will hardly understand the significance of Winter's recognition," he remarked in a low tone, "and in view of certain developments I am unable to explain fully. You remember our former conversation, however, with regard to gun-running?"

Percy nodded.

"I told you then," continued his father,

"that arms and ammunition were secretly conveyed to Sumatra, and used against the Dutch. Well, these Sumatran rebels are—Achinese."

For a moment Percy stared blankly, and then, as he grasped the significance of the Resident's statement, he exclaimed,—

"And you think that Atjeh——"

"As I said, I am unable at present to give you further particulars, but this discovery may be important—most important. I had almost decided to dismiss your syce, but now the wisest plan will be to keep him on."

"Keep him on?" echoed Percy in astonishment. "Surely it would be safer to sack him?"

"Lose sight of him? I don't think so," rejoined the Resident quietly. "No, we must keep a watch on his movements, and while he is in my service this is all the easier. I shall certainly speak to him about this affair—to take no notice might arouse his suspicions—but beyond that I shall take no steps."

"Isn't he dangerous?" insisted Percy. "Should you not have him arrested, and expose everything?"

"Expose what?" asked Mr. Alden, smiling. "There is nothing of a case at present.

There are suspicious circumstances and coincidences, I admit, which call for a certain amount of watchfulness and careful handling—I should be false to my trust otherwise. But we have absolutely no clue or evidence to act upon, and are compelled to grope in the dark."

"I suppose you are right," admitted Percy reluctantly. "But it seems such a splendid chance to nail this chap."

"I am afraid you are jumping to conclusions without reason," answered the Resident. "Just run over the facts again, and you will see this for yourself. Firstly, you learn that a Dutchman who plays you—or, rather, is *supposed* to have played you—a shabby trick bears a resemblance to a man who is 'wanted' by the authorities for 'gun-running.' Secondly, a syce, newly engaged, turns out to be a member of the tribe to which the guns are consigned. Is there any evidence to prove that the two are in collusion? Not a vestige."

He paused for a moment and cast a quick glance round.

"So far," he continued, "there is nothing to go upon; but I agree that in the circumstances, and looking to the information I have

received from Singapore, we are justified in taking every precaution. This man Atjeh is ‘suspect’ without a doubt, and for that very reason I wish to keep him under observation. In this matter you may help me materially by keeping your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut. Watch Atjeh, but don’t let him learn that he is under suspicion.”

“All right, dad; I’ll do my best to stump him out.”

“I am sure you will; but remember that it is not so much what he does, but the people he associates with, that I want to get at. There is a missing link somewhere, and I feel somehow that without knowing it you have got mixed up in the affair.”

“Me! Where on earth do I come in?”

“That is just what I cannot fathom at present,” replied Mr. Alden, nervously tapping on the table; “but why should this Achinese fellow turn up just before your arrival, and why——”

He stopped suddenly, and abruptly changed the conversation.

“Well, we shall see. I must be off to see Colonel Fell, and won’t be back till late. You are dining with Brinscombe, aren’t you?”

"Yes. I promised him last week ; but if I can be of any use——"

"No, no. I am delighted to think you have such a nice friend as Cecil. Ask him up here for a game at tennis, and to dinner afterwards. I always meant to see more of him, but put it off until you came."

He rose as he spoke, laid a hand affectionately on his son's shoulder, and passed into the veranda calling for Hassan.

Left to himself, Percy proceeded to skin another banana (or "pisang"), while he turned over in his mind the Resident's closing remarks. For the life of him he could not see what possible connection there could be between this gun-running business and his own arrival in Penang. At the same time he realized that his father entertained the idea in all seriousness, and his pulse quickened as his imagination ran riot over the endless possibilities of such a situation. To be the centre of a plot was exciting enough, although it was annoying and tantalizing to be forced to guess at the meaning of it all. What was it all about, and whom did his father suspect to be the "missing link" ? If only he might consult Cecil, and discuss the position with him ! The re-

membrance of his friend changed the current of his thoughts. He glanced hastily at his watch.

"I must be off," he muttered, pushing back his chair. "Just time for a bath and change if I am to be punctual."

Telling his boy to call a rickshaw, he hurried through his toilet, and was soon speeding down town to the club. Here he found Brinscombe waiting his arrival, and after a chat and a cup of tea they proceeded to the nets for an hour or two's practice. Several of the more enthusiastic cricketers joined them, and play was kept up until darkness forced them to desist. As the two friends strolled across to Brinscombe's house a voice suddenly hailed them, and, turning round, they recognized De Souza.

"How are you?" he asked pleasantly, holding out his hand to Percy and nodding to his companion. "I caught a glimpse of you the other evening at the bandstand. How do you like Penang?"

"Very much indeed," replied Percy, shaking hands. "I thought I saw you in a carriage, but was not quite sure."

Brinscombe was plainly put out at the meet-

ing ; but without appearing to notice his annoyance, the Eurasian attached himself to Alden, keeping up a running fire of questions and remarks. When they arrived at the house Brinscombe halted ; but as the other showed no signs of taking the hint, he was compelled to offer at least a show of hospitality.

“ Alden is dining with me to-night,” he said bluntly ; “ but if you care to come in for a little——”

“ Thanks. I should like to hear his news,” replied De Souza, accepting the offer with embarrassing alacrity, and following his host into the veranda.

While the Chinese boy supplied them with cooling drinks, Brinscombe excused himself on the plea of changing, and retired to his room, leaving Percy to entertain his unexpected visitor.

“ And what sort of a voyage did you have ? ” asked the Eurasian when they were alone. “ Were there any nice people on board ? ”

Percy replied that he had enjoyed the sail immensely, and gave a brief outline of his doings since their last meeting, wondering all the time at his companion’s interest.

“ You seem to have been in luck,” remarked

De Souza, pulling out a silver case and offering a cigar. "Now, my trip was spoilt by my berth-fellows—two Scottish engineers. Stuck to their bunks the whole way, and made things as unpleasant as possible. You seem to have fared better."

"Rather. There was a middy, Hollands, in my cabin who helped to make things lively."

"Ah! that must have been very jolly. These two-berth cabins are a bit stuffy though, I always fancy."

"It wasn't a two-berth cabin; there were three bunks," Percy began, and then halted, a sudden suspicion darting through his mind. Why had the Eurasian given the conversation its present turn, and what did he expect to learn? Was it a trap? If so, *he* had very nearly walked into it through sheer carelessness. Another moment, and he would have blurted out his opinion of their fellow-traveller to one whom his father had warned him against. The Resident's advice not to appear as though concealing anything with regard to the voyage recurred to him opportunely, just as the pause was growing noticeable.

"A three-bunk cabin!" repeated De Souza carelessly, rising to light his cigar over the

lamp. " You and the middy must have had a rare time."

" We had another companion, a Dutchman called Richellmann, who rather spoilt the fun," admitted Percy. " In fact, we didn't hit it off very well."

" A Dutchman? What sort of a chap?" continued the Eurasian, ostensibly busy with his cigar.

Percy described him accurately, not forgetting the spectacles, and then, after hesitating a moment, burst out in a confidential tone,—

" Look here, De Souza, if you won't give us away, I'll tell you something that happened to us at Port Said which I don't want passed on in case we get laughed at."

As if reassured by a nod, he ran lightly over their adventure, treating the whole thing as a joke, and purposely attributing the affair to the result of their own stupidity.

" It turned out all right," he concluded, smiling; " but we held our tongues about it on board the *Caledonia*, for fear of being chaffed."

The Eurasian laughed heartily, affecting to treat the matter as a joke, and before he could resume further questioning Brinscombe reappeared, and he rose to take his leave.

"Well, I must be going," he said, picking up his straw hat. "No doubt you will have a long chat about the old days at Felton College. Good-night."

"The bounder!" growled Brinscombe, when the gate had shut. "It's like his beastly cheek shoving his way in here when he knows I never mix with his set."

"Do you remember what the Doctor said to us on your last night at College?"

"About treating Eurasians as white men? Oh yes, but it's all rubbish. Quite impossible out here. Besides, there's something about that chap I can't stand, whatever the colour of his skin might be. What was he talking to you about?"

"My voyage mostly. He seemed desperately keen to hear about my fellow-passengers —especially the Dutchman Richellmann. I wonder—"

"He's just anxious to make the most of your acquaintance because you're the Resident's son," interrupted Brinscombe, with an expression of disgust. "You'll have to keep him at arm's length, or he'll be making up to you on every possible occasion, though I must say this is the first time he has actually had

the cheek to enter my house. Come along and have a wash up. Dinner will be ready in a few minutes."

Throughout dinner Percy's thoughts kept wandering to the object of De Souza's conversation, and once or twice he found himself answering at random his friend's queries.

"What's come over you?" asked Cecil at last. "A penny for your thoughts, or, rather, a dollar."

"Sorry can't oblige," retorted Percy, laughing. "My thoughts were wandering, I'm afraid. What was that you were saying just now?"

"I'll repeat it slowly for your benefit," replied Brinscombe, with a resigned air. "I remarked that my first boy was dismissed for tampering with my papers—letters, and so on. Can you take that in?"

Percy nodded, laughing.

"Well, after he left, there was no trouble for a long time; but the other day—the evening after you had been here—I had occasion to look over some papers, and found my desk open. Now, I know for a fact that I left it locked, and that the key has never been out of my possession. Presumably, therefore, some

one has procured a false key, and deliberately opened the desk."

"Are you certain the lock was not picked?"

"No. That is possible. But it had not been forced in any way, because my key still locks and unlocks it. That is a detail, however. The main point is, who is the culprit, and what on earth is his object?"

"You don't keep any money in the desk?"

"Not a cent. I thought of that, but as there were two or three dollars lying on the dressing-table within a few feet, money was evidently not wanted."

"Strange! How do you account for it, then?"

"Ah! there you have me. The only conceivable explanation seems to be that some of the Chinamen who run these notorious gambling dens feared a police raid, and set a spy to collar any communications which passed between Colonel Fell and myself. It sounds rather far-fetched, but I can think of nothing else."

"Does Colonel Fell write you about such matters?"

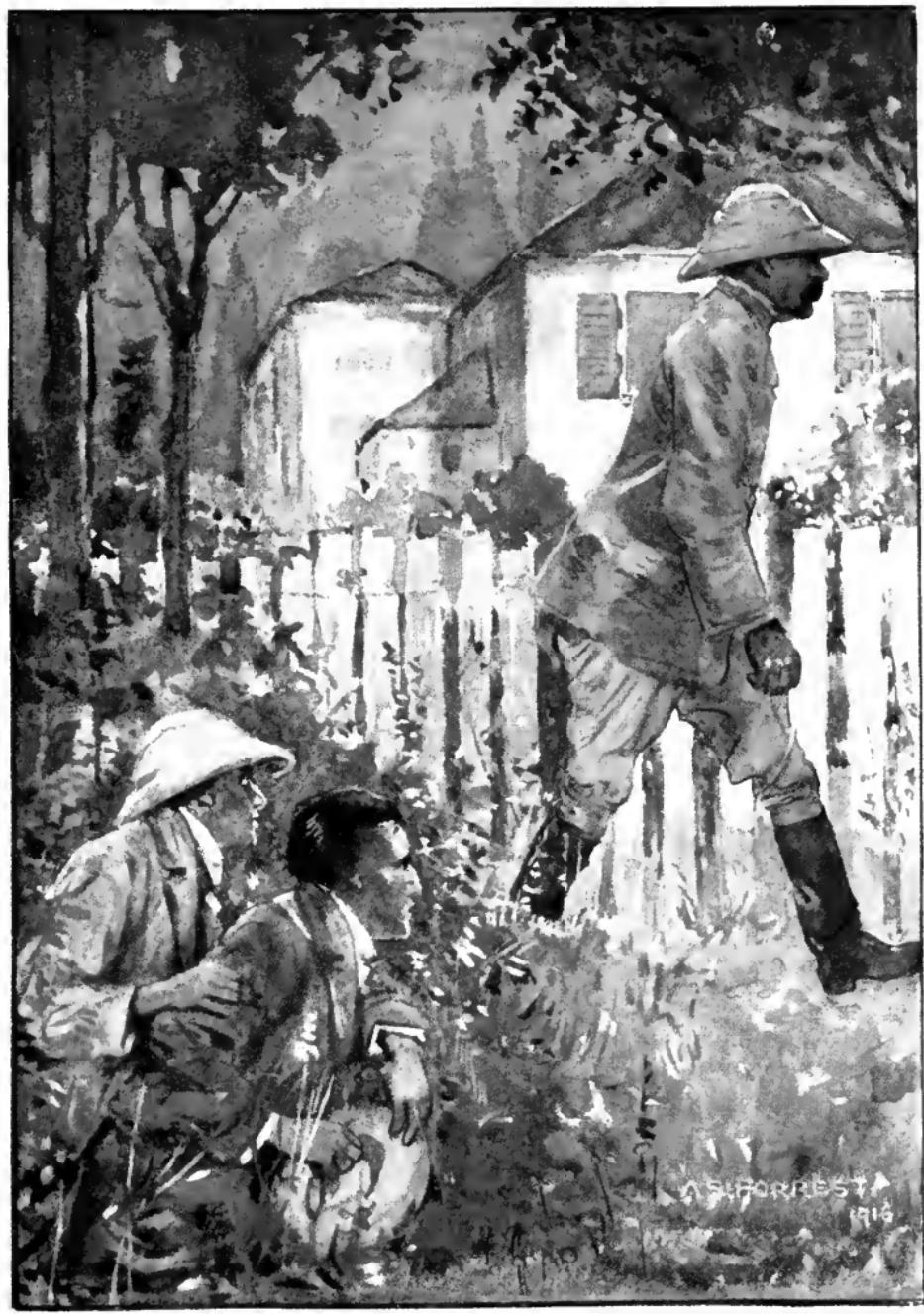
"Very seldom, and then only to ask me to go up and see him at the office."

"It seems hardly worth while setting any one to intercept such a letter."

"That is so; but then, of course, these fellows don't know how much—or little—is contained in such a note, and it is worth risking, in view of the great loss sustained by a raid. Why, they try to bribe all the English sergeants, and sometimes the officers. Not long after I came here, a towki, one of the biggest Chinamen in the place, called on me one afternoon, and, after a few preliminary compliments, began to remark on the beauty of that old bookcase over there. Now I bought it for five dollars second-hand, and was quite at a loss to understand what the towki was driving at."

"It doesn't look up to much, certainly," Percy agreed.

"Well, after beating about the bush a little longer, the fellow came quite close, and whispered that he would give one thousand dollars for the bookstand. I protested that it wasn't for sale; but he merely stood and blinked at me—no doubt imagining that the price wasn't high enough, for presently he raised it to twelve hundred dollars. Then I lost my temper, and told him to clear out and take his



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The man stole forward and disappeared into the surrounding gloom.

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crazy offers elsewhere and leave me in peace. He bowed quite politely, still smiling placidly, and, taking up his straw hat, made his exit, pausing for a moment to say, ‘ You thinkee again. Muchee plice good for you. We fiends —good for me. If can do, lite.’ Then suddenly the whole thing burst upon me, and I realized that the old brute wanted to bribe me. If I had got hold of him at that moment it would have gone hard with him ; but he was already on the road, and I could hardly assault him publicly.”

“ The beast ! ” ejaculated Percy. “ Did he ever repeat his offer ? ”

“ Hardly. Within ten days we raided one of his dens, and nailed the old boy himself *in flagrante delicto*. The subsequent fine and imprisonment was the best answer I could think of.”

For a time the two friends continued their talk, and then Brinscombe suggested that they should go up to the club for a game at billiards.

After a moment’s hesitation Percy declined.

“ To tell you the truth,” he explained, “ I would like to have a look round.”

“ A look round ! At this time ! ”

“ Yes. I have never been for a stroll yet at

night, and I would like very much to see De Souza's house. Is it far from here?"

"Well, you are a queer chap. What on earth do you want with De Souza's house? You aren't thinking of calling on him, are you?"

"No, I'm not. Look here! I can't tell you anything, because I promised the pater to hold my tongue; but there is some mystery, some hanky-panky going on, and De Souza's talk has given me an idea. There may be nothing in it, of course; but if there is, we may have some fun. Are you on?"

"Rather! I haven't the remotest idea what you're driving at; but in any case De Souza's house is on your way home, and I can walk to the Residency with you and get a rickshaw back. Come along."

Selecting a stout Malacca cane, Cecil offered another to his friend, remarking that they "might be useful."

The road past the Maidan was still full of rickshaws coming and going, and as they passed the club, ablaze with light, the cheery hum of voices floated out on the still air.

"I think this is the way my rickshaw coolie took me the other night," said Percy, glancing round as they struck off to the left.

"Very likely," answered his companion indifferently. "It is more direct than the sea road."

They trudged along for some time silently, enjoying the refreshing coolness, till at last Brinscombe halted and pointed ahead with his cane.

"Do you see that light amongst the trees over there?" he asked. "That is De Souza's house. This road leads past the back. If we turn off to the right we can get round to the front."

Percy glanced round with heightened interest. Surely it was here, at this corner, that he had come upon his syce a week ago. Was it a coincidence, or was he on the track of the missing link?

"Let's keep on the back way first," he said, insensibly lowering his voice. "We can go round to the front afterwards."

He moved forward as he spoke, his companion following; but when within a few yards of the next lamp-post he stopped suddenly and laid a warning hand on his friend's arm.

"There's some one coming from the house," he whispered. "I want to hide and watch them. Where can we go?"

"The ditch," answered Cecil in the same tone. "No, the other side, away from the lamp. Quick!"

On tiptoes the boys ran across the road, and slipped into the dry ditch three feet deep just as stealthy footsteps approached and a dark figure appeared at the little gate in the hedge at the other side. After a pause which seemed interminable, there followed the sound of a latch gently withdrawn, and a second figure slipped through on to the road. A murmur of words, the click of the latch re-fastened, and the second figure stole forward quietly, keeping as far as possible in the shadow. A twig snapped under Brinscombe's feet, and instantly the new-comer halted, alert and suspicious. The two boys held their breath fearfully, and, apparently reassured with one swift glance round, the man they were watching stole forward and disappeared into the surrounding gloom. As he did so, unable to restrain himself longer, Percy clutched his friend's arm and whispered, in a tremor of excitement, "It's Richellmann—the Dutchman from the *Caledonia!*!"

## CHAPTER VIII.

### THE "FLYING DUTCHMAN."

"I SAW him quite distinctly ! It's Richellmann sure enough," repeated Percy, raising his voice in his excitement and standing erect. "Come on after him!"

With a warning "Hist!" his companion pulled him down again and, clapping a hand lightly over his mouth, whispered in his ear, "Some one coming back to the gate. Follow me!"

Releasing his hold, he commenced to worm his way along the ditch on all fours, followed by Percy. Although the distance was comparatively short, it seemed hours before the intersecting road was reached and the corner safely turned. With a sigh of relief the two lads scrambled out of the ditch and rose cautiously to their feet.

For a moment they stood listening intently ; then the sound of the gate latch being raised

broke the silence. Without waiting to hear more, they set off, running softly on tiptoes. Two hundred yards farther on another intersecting road intervened, and dodging down this for a short distance, Cecil at length slowed down into a walk.

"A trap!" he panted, looking round sharply—"a palpable trap! I don't know what you're after, but your friend the Dutchman has evidently reason to fear that his movements are watched. I smell good sport, but can't you give me some idea of the game?"

"Of course I shall," responded Percy eagerly. "I'm sure father would wish it now. But we must follow Richellmann at once. Quick!"

"Steady on! How d'you know you *are* following him?"

"He went this way—at least, he turned the corner. You don't mean to say you think he has given us the slip?"

"I don't mean to say anything until I understand what the fellow's object is. However, I think we are on a hot scent. This road leads back to town, and as it would hardly be wise to go back just at present, we can hold straight on, keeping a bright look-out, and you can spin your yarn as we go."

Nothing loath, Percy proceeded to give a detailed account of all the chain of circumstances which had led up to his own and the Resident's suspicions.

"But I can't see where I come in," he concluded despondingly.

"No more do I just at present," was the reply; "but your father seems to be right so far, else why was De Souza so anxious to pump you about your voyage? I wish you had told me all this before."

"I promised——"

"I quite understand your position, old chap, and your father has probably private reasons for his decision; but that doesn't help us now when we have missed a glorious chance of unravelling a part, at least, of the mystery. The 'Flying Dutchman'! Why, any of our men out here would give their ears to lay him by the heels!"

"It is beastly bad luck, but we may pick him up yet. At any rate, we've supplied one missing link and fixed up that sly rascal De Souza. What on earth does he want with Richellmann?"

"We can only guess, but I fancy the Resident, from what you tell me, has suspected

that lot for some time. Who's that? Only a native. I'm afraid our man has given us the slip, old chap. It has been plain sailing so far, but now we are so near the town it is hopeless to dream of picking up any one who wishes to conceal his movements."

"What a nuisance," said Percy vehemently, "to fail just when luck seemed to have turned our way! If we had gone round to the front of the house we would have missed Richellmann, but now, after seeing him, to lose him like this—"

"The front of the house!" repeated Cecil slowly, staring at his chum. "Man, I believe you've hit it! It was stupid of me not to think of it before."

"What do you mean? What should you have thought of?"

"The front entrance. Yes, I'm sure of it. Come on, there is a chance yet. I'll tell you about it as we go along." And turning abruptly on his heel, he retraced his steps along the road they had come.

"You see, it's this way," Brinscombe explained in answer to his companion's eager questions: "Richellmann, as he calls himself, is far too cute a bird to fall into the first open

trap his enemies may set for him. He knows very well that he is a marked man and is risking a lot in setting foot in Penang. He may have reason to suspect you even, but can have no doubt whatever about the issue if once he is captured. Consequently he and his friend concocted a simple scheme to find out if they were watched. The parting at the gate was a fake ; the start was a false one. When he reached the cross road, instead of heading for the town, Richellmann doubled on his track and darted round to the house by the front road, there to await the report of his companion. This fellow—it may have been De Souza himself, or his father—was to make a pretence of retiring and then return quickly and discover if the Dutchman was being spied upon. They succeeded in throwing us off the scent, but whether they spotted us it is impossible to say."

" By Jove ! I believe you're right. Do you think Richellmann is still in the house ? "

" That is just the point. Anyway, it is our only chance, and I mean to take it. Only we must try and diddle *them* this time, and to do this I want you to go home."

" Back to the Residency ? " repeated Percy blankly.

"Yes, openly and ostentatiously back to the Residency. If they suspect you they will either think you have given up the chase or are going back to inform your father. That will be Richellmann's opportunity for slipping away, and then it is up to me to hang on to him."

"Oh, that's all right for you, but where do I come in?"

"Later on. When you reach the Residency, stay there half an hour or so in case you are watched. Of course, if your father is in you had better tell him all about it, and he will take what steps he considers best. If he is away—I think you said he was dining out—take a rickshaw, after waiting as I have said, and drive down by the sea road to my house. Tell my boy to bring Abdul, one of my native policemen, to speak to you, and order him to go at once to Tja Bo's house and wait there for me. If things fall out as I hope, I shall send you a message by him. You had better leave a note telling your father that you may spend the night with me. Now we are getting close to Souza's house, and it is time I vanished. You know your way? Turn to the left, past the gate, then straight on till you come to the hospital. After that it's plain sailing."

The speaker slipped noiselessly into the ditch, and with a last whispered injunction of "Don't forget—Tja Bo," instantly vanished from sight.

Left to himself, Percy gazed around, somewhat bewildered by the turn of events, and then, recollecting the part he had to play, squared his shoulders and set out resolutely for the scene of their recent adventure. As he turned the fateful corner a clock away back in the town struck the hour, and he counted up to ten. Mechanically he consulted his watch. Yes, ten o'clock. It would take him about thirty minutes to get to the Residency; half an hour's wait there, and another twenty minutes to get back by rickshaw to Brinscombe's house. "Half-past eleven!" he muttered to himself. "We're evidently going to have a night of it. Ha! there's the gate. Now for it!"

In spite of himself he felt his heart beat more quickly as he approached the spot, and instinctively he edged to the far side of the road. Now, abreast, a quick glance to the right and he was past. To his excited imagination the darkness behind the wicket appeared to be peopled with the sinister shadows

of enemies lurking in the gloom, but not a sound reached his ears as he strode on his way. If the feeling of nervousness had been manifest whilst still the danger was in front, it was much worse now that it lay behind. His imagination ran riot in a thousand ways, and he pictured a stealthy approach and attack from the rear. He shivered, and a creepy feeling ran down his spine. With an effort he restrained a temptation to look back, and the remembrance that Cecil, unseen and unsuspected, was also on the look-out, revived his courage. After all, why should he be the object of Richellmann's attack? The idea was absurd! The Dutchman's whole aim was to escape unseen, and on that, no doubt, he would concentrate all his thoughts and energies for the present. Already the lights of the hospital gleamed faintly through the trees ahead, and the wheels of a gharry were audible coming down the road towards him. He stepped aside to allow the driver to pass, and gazed idly after the vehicle as it rolled leisurely towards the town. A hundred yards down the road the light from its lamps fell for an instant on the form of a native standing aside to let it pass as he had done. The sound

of the wheels died away in the distance and a silence fell again. Still Percy lingered, idly watching for the approach of the native he had momentarily seen ; but the minutes passed and he did not appear. A vague feeling of suspicion began to steal over him again, growing at last to certainty.

" By Jove ! Cecil was right," he muttered to himself when the truth forced itself upon him, " and if I don't watch myself I'll give the show away. I must remember that my part is that of the decoy duck."

He stooped to make an elaborate show of tying his shoe lace, and then, twirling his cane, set off once more, whistling gaily. The feeling of nervousness had given place to one of elation at the thought that he was taking a hand in the game of bluff Brinscombe had planned out so skilfully, and it was almost with regret that he quitted the road and turned in at the avenue leading to the Residency. Not once since the passing of the carriage had his pursuer by sight or sound betrayed his presence, but instinct warned Percy that the man was somewhere close at hand. On reaching the porch the lad found the native " oppas," or watchman, at his post, and in response to inquiries

discovered that his father had not yet returned. From the discordant sounds proceeding from the kitchen premises it appeared obvious that the boys were taking advantage of his absence to indulge in a musical evening, and consequently Percy was enabled to gain his room unobserved. Turning up the lamp ostentatiously for the benefit of Richellmann's emissary, he looked at his watch, determined to obey his friend's instructions to the letter. Ten-thirty-five! Eleven o'clock would be time enough to send for a rickshaw, and till then he had to amuse himself as best he might. Lighting a cigarette, he pulled out his writing-case and proceeded to scribble a short note to his father explaining his absence. At first he was inclined to give an account of the evening's adventures, but on second thoughts decided that it was safer to commit nothing to paper, and stated merely the fact that he was spending the night with Cecil. Sealing and addressing the note, he laid it on his father's dressing-table, and then proceeded to look out and examine a small revolver which Hollands had presented as a parting gift. Loading the six chambers, he next changed his white duck suit for one of navy blue flannel he had worn on the voyage,

and slipped the pistol into his coat pocket. A glance at his watch showed him that it was now five minutes to the hour, and the more completely to throw any watcher off the scent, he turned out the lamp as though he had retired to bed. When the clock in the hall struck the hour he rose, and, softly opening and closing his door, stole along the veranda and down the front stairs, intending to order the oppas to call a rickshaw. Already he was half-way across the hall, making for the front door, when the sound of footsteps pattering along the servants' passage caught his ear and arrested his movements. As he looked the "tatty" was pushed aside and Swee Hin appeared like a ghost in his white baju and voluminous trousers. He paused a moment listening, and then, muttering something in his own language, made for the staircase.

Stepping out of the shadow, Percy called to him, "Swee Hin!"

The lamp was flickering fitfully, but a momentary gleam lit up the boy's yellow mask, and Percy was amazed to notice the ugly spasm of fear and defiance that swept over it. Next moment, having recognized his master, the Chinaman resumed his usual impassive demeanour.

" Ya, Tuan," he answered quietly.

" What are you doing here ? " demanded Percy, grown suddenly suspicious.

" I came to look at the lamps," replied Swee Hin stolidly, pointing to the one beside him, which obviously needed attention.

" Good," responded the English lad, rather nonplussed at the ready, matter-of-fact statement ; " you had better put it right before the Tuan Besar returns. I have left a note for him. I am going out again. Call a rickshaw at once."

" Baik, Tuan." The boy withdrew, and Percy sat down to await the arrival of the conveyance, which shortly rattled up to the door. Stepping in, he ordered the coolie to take him round by the sea road to the club, and was soon bowling along the now almost deserted highway. On nearing the club Percy told the coolie to go on to Tuan Brinscombe's house, and arrived there at a quarter to twelve. Intending to dismiss the rickshaw, he put his hand in his pocket for the fare, and discovered that he had left all his change in his other suit.

" I have no money with me," he confessed, " but will give you a dollar to-morrow if you come to the Residency."

The fellow shook his head, evidently not understanding the Malay words, and Percy was just wondering how he was to get rid of him when Brinscombe's boy appeared on the scene.

"Here, tell him I've forgotten my money," explained Percy, "but if he comes to me to-morrow or goes now to Swee Hin, my boy, who called him, he will get the fare."

Brinscombe's boy proceeded to translate the message into Chinese with many guttural clicks and hiccoughs, but the negotiations did not appear to proceed smoothly.

"He says, Tuan," announced the interpreter at last in Malay, "that he wants his money to-night. He does not know the Tuan, and says it was not a Chinese boy who called him, but a Javanese syce."

"A syce!" repeated Percy, his thoughts reverting in a flash to Atjeh. "Ask him—no, never mind—get rid of this coolie somehow—pay him yourself—and then fetch Abdul. I wish to give him an order from Tuan Brinscombe."

He turned away impatiently and entered the house, leaving the two Chinamen to fight the matter out between them. For some time

their voices could be heard in dispute, but at length a bargain was arranged and the rickshaw coolie departed, and shortly afterwards Brinscombe's boy returned with the native policeman. Clad merely in his usual mufti of shirt and sarong, with bare feet and head, Abdul's appearance betokened little of the majesty of the law ; but he drew himself together and saluted smartly when Percy addressed him.

" Tuan Brinscombe wishes you to go to him, Abdul. Can you go at once ? "

" Yes, Tuan."

" Good. You will find him at Tja Bo's house. Go cautiously, because you may be watched, and Tuan Brinscombe does not wish to be discovered. When you find him he will tell you what to do. I shall wait here. Do you understand ? "

" Yes, Tuan."

Without further ado Abdul saluted and melted into the darkness outside, his bare feet treading the ground as surely and softly as a cat's.

Apprised by the pangs of hunger that it was now some hours since dinner, Percy appealed to the Chinese boy, who speedily produced a capital supper, to which the English lad did

not fail to do full justice. When he had finished, remembering his friend's long fast, he filled his pockets with biscuits and other scraps, and then, lighting a cigarette and flinging himself into a long chair, prepared to await the expected summons. The coolie's reference to a "syce" had awakened suspicions in his mind ; but now that he was about to join issue in the main chase, his thoughts reverted to the " Flying Dutchman." What was he doing in Penang, and what connection had he with the De Souzas ? He puzzled over the various aspects of the situation until his head began to nod, and he drew himself up with a start to find Abdul standing in front of his chair at " attention."

" Well, Abdul, what message did Tuan Brinscombe send ? " he asked eagerly.

" Tuan Brinscombe asks the Tuan to follow Abdul and go to him. We must go carefully and 'djaga baik baik.' "

" All right. I'll keep my eyes open and look out," answered Percy, rising. " Come on."

To his surprise, Abdul turned inland, past the club, and on being questioned, replied that " bad men might be watching them, and they must 'djaga baik baik.' " In pursuance of these

tactics he led the way up and down and round and round until at last, when Percy was completely bewildered as to his whereabouts, Abdul stood a moment motionless, glancing quickly to right and left, and then, motioning to his companion to follow, he darted through a gap in the hedge behind them, crossed a narrow plank bridge over a wide ditch, and, producing a key from somewhere under his sarong, opened a door in the wooden building facing them. Entering quickly, he pulled Percy after him, and carefully shut and locked the door. Then bidding his companion follow closely, he stole cautiously through what appeared to be a "go-down," or storehouse, and emerged from a door at the far end on to a dirty courtyard surrounded by squalid houses of wood with brick tiling. Picking his way towards the centre building, Abdul stumbled over some object lying in a hollow, and started back with an exclamation of anger and disgust as a young pig fled grunting in affright. With a muttered imprecation on the "unclean beast," the Mussulman advanced to a low doorway and knocked thrice as a signal. The door was immediately opened by an old Chinaman in spectacles, who, after an interchange of passwords, stood aside

to admit entrance. Percy found himself in a little room, evidently a kitchen, but had no time to make observations, as the Chinaman, after shutting and bolting the door, led the way down a dark passage to what appeared to be a jeweller's shop, judging by the glass trays of ornaments and trinkets lining the counters. A lamp, carefully shaded, was burning low in one corner, and by its dim light Percy made out some one kneeling on the floor at the other side, gazing out through the wooden shutters. At their entrance the figure turned and disclosed the welcome features of his friend Cecil. An exclamation of relief rose to Percy's lips, but was checked by a quick gesture of warning. Motioning Abdul to take his place at the shutters, Brinscombe rose stiffly, and, stretching his limbs with evident relief, limped slowly across the shop floor.

"By Jove! I am stiff," he complained in an undertone, rubbing his cramped muscles. "Glad you've come, old chap. Was Mr. Alden at home when you got back?"

"No, he had not returned," replied Percy, adopting the other's tone. "I was followed to the Residency, but got away clear, I think. But what are you doing here?"

" Keeping an eye on your friend Richellmann over the way there," nodding towards the window. " Wait till I've had a cup of old Tja Bo's excellent tea, and you'll hear all about it. I'm starving!"

He spoke a few words to the old Chinaman, who was still standing by, and the latter silently withdrew, to return in a few minutes with a fragrant brew of tea.

" Here's something to eat with it," whispered Percy, producing his biscuits and sandwiches from his pockets. " Your boy gave me a good supper before starting."

" You're a brick!" mumbled Cecil, his mouth full, and not another word did he utter until the last biscuit had disappeared.

" Now," he sighed at last, in the same guarded tone, " I'll tell you all there is to know. After you left I hid myself at the corner of the road and awaited events. Nothing happened until a gharry came rattling down the road, the driver, judging from his erratic course, being evidently drunk, for more than once the wheels were on the edge of the ditch at either side."

" He was going straight enough when he passed me," interjected Percy.

" Like enough. Just opposite the Souzas'

back gate the pony seemed to swerve right across the road and back the gharry into the side. The man jumped down, and after some difficulty righted matters, and, having resumed his seat, came rattling past me, using his whip to some purpose. As the gharry took the corner sharply the door swung open, and a hand—a white hand, mind you—reached out and pulled it to. Instantly the meaning of the trick flashed across my mind. The driver was feigning drunkenness, and the stoppage opposite the gate was prearranged to enable our quarry to slip in unobserved. Richellmann was inside the gharry and must be followed, but I had reasons for believing that the game was working out as I had expected."

"But how—why——?"

"Never mind just now. To cut a long story short, I managed to keep the gharry in sight until the town was reached. Then, fearing that I might be noticed, I crept in here by the back way, and have spent the rest of my time on my knees keeping watch ever since. Twenty minutes after I arrived a big man dressed in a dark suit, with a slouch hat pulled down over his face, entered the door opposite, and—we must wait till he comes out!"

“ Richellmann ? ”

The other nodded, a gleam of triumph in his eyes.

“ How did you guess he would come here ? ” whispered Percy in astonishment.

“ Because that is De Souza’s office and store, and——”

A warning gesture from Abdul cut short the reply, and simultaneously Cecil blew out the lamp. In the dead silence stealthy footsteps could be heard on the pavement outside, but they passed on, and Abdul rose.

“ An evil man watching, Tuan,” he whispered in explanation. “ He knows Tja Bo a friend of the police.”

“ Looks like it,” muttered Cecil. “ We’ll have to shift.”

Moved by a sudden impulse, Percy tiptoed across the room and stooped to peer out into the dimly lit street. The narrow slit gave small scope for observation, and he was about to open the shutters for a more extensive view when his heart thrilled and his hands dropped powerless at his side. Slowly, noiselessly, quite uncannily, a dark head rose out of nowhere on the other side of the window, and a swarthy face was pressed against the glass not two

inches away. In the uncertain light no features were visible, but the whites of the eyes glinted, rolling horribly with savage menace. Spell-bound, Percy remained gazing at the fearful apparition, whose breathing sounded distinctly in his ear. At length, with startling suddenness, the face vanished as mysteriously as it had appeared, and Percy, turning, groped his way blindly back to his comrade.

## CHAPTER IX.

### A NIGHT ADVENTURE.

"**A** SPY!" he gasped—"a spy looking in at the window just now!"

"Steady! Not so loud," rejoined Cecil, laying a warning hand over the speaker's mouth. "No doubt it's the fellow we heard passing."

"It's a native," whispered Percy, pulling himself together with an effort. "He tried to see into the room—his eyes rolled horribly."

"He suspects this place, that's evident. We must clear out, Abdul."

He spoke a few sentences rapidly in the policeman's ear, and the latter groped his way back to the window and resumed his watch.

"This way," continued Cecil, taking his friend by the arm. "Here's the door."

Once safely in the passage, he whistled

softly, and the old Chinaman appeared, carrying a lamp.

"I want you to let us out by one of the side doors," explained Cecil in Malay. "Some one is watching this street."

The Chinaman considered a moment, and then, beckoning them to follow, retraced his footsteps down the passage. Here he slid back a panel which opened into the next house, and in a similar way gained entrance to another. From the roof of this, by means of a ladder, they crossed a back lane, and entered another row of houses honeycombed with secret passages like the first. Now and then they came upon an occupant, but a word from their guide appeared sufficient explanation, and they continued their way until Percy was thoroughly bewildered. At last the Chinaman unlocked a rickety door, and after a cautious look round, intimated that the coast was clear. The two lads stepped out into the open air with a sigh of relief, and Cecil, turning, thanked Tja Bo for his services, and promised to report him to Colonel Fell. With a gratified chuckle the old man bowed himself into the house again, the key grated in the lock, and the two Englishmen were left alone.

"Where on earth are we, and what sort of houses—?" began Percy, when his companion cut him short.

"Tja Bo's in the pay of the police. The houses in this part of the town nearly all communicate with one another, hence our difficulty in catching criminals. As to where we are—follow me closely. I'm going to double back to the rear of Souza's warehouse."

Following the narrow lane for some distance, they emerged shortly on the main street, which was fairly well illuminated by gas lamps. Here and there a light shone from some of the houses, and an occasional Malay passed noiselessly along on bare feet, or the clack-clack of wooden slippers heralded the approach of a festive Chinaman. Watching his opportunity, Cecil darted across the roadway, with Percy following close at his heels, and down an alley on the other side. Fifty yards farther on they emerged again from between the houses, and by the cool breeze which suddenly arose, Percy surmised that they were near the sea.

"This is the quay," whispered Cecil, halting, "and the question is——"

He broke off, gazing out towards the streets.

"What's the difficulty?" queried Percy.

"Can't we go on as we are? We've been lucky so far, and no one seems to have spotted us."

"Yes, we've been lucky so far, as you say," replied Cecil, "and we're in luck again. Do you see those dark heaps over there? Some boat has been unloading timber right opposite De Souza's office. If we can get behind one of these piles unseen——"

"Let's try! We can creep along the edge of the quay and risk it."

"Come on, then. If I lie low, mind you do the same at once."

Keeping as much as possible in the shadow, they stole across the roadway to the very edge of the quay, where, with the sea lapping the wall ten feet below, they crept cautiously on towards the nearest pile of timber. Nearer and nearer they drew, until, when within twenty yards of their goal, they found themselves about to cross the feeble zone of light cast by the lamp opposite the warehouse door. Another step, and suddenly Cecil sank to the ground, and in a moment his companion had followed his example. Not a footstep broke the silence. For a few seconds Percy remained motionless, then raised his head and gazed warily round. No one was in sight, and

he was about to question his leader when a movement near the heap of wood for which they were making arrested his attention and stilled his voice. Silently a dark figure detached itself from the background, and advanced a few paces into the light, peering stealthily round. The two lads lay motionless, prone on the ground, and at length, as though satisfied with his scrutiny, the native flitted noiselessly over to the lamp, and quickly extinguished the light. Instantly the two watchers were on their feet, and, stealing over the intervening space, gained the pile of timber, behind which they sank, excited and breathless.

"Nearly had that time," whispered Percy, with a chuckle. "The beggar must have been posted here to keep watch."

"Yes, and he's dished us after all, I'm afraid," replied Cecil, peeping over the logs of wood. "Now that the lamp is out, it is quite impossible to pick things out clearly, and with so many native spies about it's hopeless to try and get nearer. Hist! They are coming out."

The sound of a door being quietly opened was followed by the murmur of subdued

voices ; but, strain their eyes as they would, the boys were unable to make out anything except a jumble of dark patches near the warehouse. Presently two figures appeared to detach themselves and move off towards the jetty, and by the sound of the footsteps, cautious though they were, it was easy to guess that they were not barefooted natives. Percy rose impulsively to his feet, meditating pursuit ; but his friend laid a restraining hold on his arm.

" It's no go," he whispered earnestly ; " these fellows opposite would spot us like a shot."

Even as he spoke one of the natives glided across the quay, and, passing within hand-touch of the Englishmen, leant over the edge, and raised aloft a small lantern. Thrice he raised it, showing alternately red, white, and green, and almost immediately there came in answer over the water the plaintive " jug-jug " of the nightjar. Once more the white light of the lantern was flashed out to sea, and then, wheeling abruptly, the signalman moved forward noiselessly, keeping parallel with the two first figures, who were now some distance away.

" Listen for a boat," whispered Cecil in his friend's ear. " Ah ! there she goes."

The sound of oars in the water was distinctly audible, though the darkness hid the boat and rowers from their sight.

"He'll escape. Richellmann will get away," said Percy despondently. "Can we do nothing to prevent him? I have a pistol."

"A pistol! What on earth is the use of it just now? If you run after the Dutchman you'll be knifed to a certainty before covering fifty yards. If you fire you'll give the whole show away."

"Then all the trouble we've taken is useless," retorted Percy, raising his voice in his excitement. "Why——"

"Hush, man! Remember where we are," entreated his companion. "There is no reason to get shirty. Richellmann may get away for the moment; but we've done a good night's work."

"How? If the Dutchman gets away we've lost our opportunity."

"And gained some very valuable information. Do you see these three ships lying out there close together? The signal— Quiet a moment! The boat's stopped. Some one is getting into her. There! Did you hear that? He's away, and it's time we were looking out

for ourselves. These natives may be suspicious, and I don't want to be spotted. Come on ! We'll get away while we can."

Cautiously on all fours the two boys crawled along the edge of the quay, returning the way they had come. Not until they had gone a hundred yards or so did Cecil rise to his feet, and then, after a quick glance on either side, he led the way to the shelter of the lane. Here he paused a moment, listening intently.

" Safe so far ; but the sooner we get to my house the better. We'll chance the main street ; it's shorter."

Moving at a sharp pace, they turned into the main thoroughfare, now deserted, and were almost within sight of their destination when Cecil whispered suddenly,—

" Don't turn your head or take any notice. We're followed—a native hiding in a doorway at the opposite side."

A few more steps, and they reached the turning leading to Cecil's house. In spite of the warning, as they swung round the corner Percy could not resist a glance over his shoulder. At the same instant the light of the lamp fell on the face of the man who followed, distinctly illuminating his features, and the

English lad started and gave an involuntary exclamation.

"Here we are. Don't get rattled at the last moment," muttered Cecil, grasping at his arm. "Mind the step. There! You'll be better after a bite and a rest. Boy!"

"I'm all right," returned Percy indignantly, though, truth to tell, now that the excitement was over, he felt very tired and sleepy. "I'm all right; but—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted his friend, giving orders to the boy to bring some sandwiches and lemonade. "I know you felt sick at Richellmann's escape, and no wonder; but we have him, man; I'm sure of it. You remember I pointed out three ships in the offing?"

"Yes, but—"

"Well, these ships were the only ones from which the signal from the lantern could have been observed. To-morrow I'll find out from the harbour authorities all about these ships, and if we don't lay our man by the heels within a few days, call me a half-caste."

He chuckled gleefully, and took another handful of sandwiches.

"I see your plan, and hope it will turn out all right," rejoined Percy doubtfully. "But

I'm afraid of that fellow who followed us just now."

" Oh, him ! He was waiting not far from here, and couldn't have guessed where we had been. Don't worry about him. I used to be awfully scared about that sort of thing, but have got quite used to it."

" It's not that. I wasn't frightened at him following us ; but as we turned the corner I got a good glimpse of him, and recognized the beggar."

" Recognized him ! How d'you mean ? "

" I mean that he probably knows what we've been up to. It was Atjeh."

" Atjeh ! Who's he ? "

" My syce."

" Whew ! The Achinese ! That alters the matter pretty considerably. Bother the chap, though it's all in the game. We must think this out, but not to-night. It's two o'clock, and I'm dog-tired. What do you say to a sleep ? "

" Amen. I'm just about beat."

Having bolted the doors and turned out the light, the two friends stumbled up to their rooms, and, flinging themselves on their beds, were soon fast asleep. Percy's slumbers were

disturbed by vivid dreams, in which he fancied himself pursued by Richellmann and a gigantic Malay. Brinscombe appeared in the nick of time, and bowled over the native, and then, just as the Dutchman stretched out a hand to seize him, Hollands swooped down like a bolt from the blue and carried him off safely in his aeroplane. The machine began to rock violently. He heard some one cry out "Steady!" and next moment he found himself gazing up into the face of Cecil, who was bending over him laughing.

"Wake up, old chap," he cried merrily, "and come to solid earth. When I shook your shoulder you yelled out something about 'upsetting the machine and falling through the air.' Were you dreaming of an aeroplane?"

"Yes," answered Percy, blinking stupidly. "Where's Hollands?"

"Oh, wake up," laughed his friend, shaking him again. "It's past eleven. You've missed breakfast, but tiffin is ready."

"Eleven o'clock!" shouted Percy, jumping out of bed in astonishment, realizing all at once that the sunshine was pouring into the room. "Eleven o'clock! I thought we had only just gone to sleep."

"While in reality you have had nearly a round of the clock, while I— But have a tub and get dressed, and then we'll talk. I must go and see Abdul."

Left to himself, Percy hurried through his toilet, and, much refreshed, ran down the stairs just as the boy announced tiffin.

"Now then, fire away," he said, as they drew in their chairs. "I'm as hungry as a hawk, and will do the eating if you'll do the talking."

Brinscombe laughingly assented.

"There's not much to tell after all," he began. "My boy wakened me at six as usual, and finding you were still fast asleep, I told him not to waken you, but give me breakfast by myself. Then I went straight to the harbour officials."

"Did you nail the Dutchman?"

"No, nor did I expect to do so. I found out, however, all about these three ships, and the clue should lead to the discovery of Richellmann sooner or later."

"Sooner or later! Why, man, I hoped to hear he was safe under lock and key by this time."

\* Cecil burst out laughing at the comical look of disappointment on his friend's face.

" You're a treat, old chap," he exclaimed, helping himself to another plateful of curry. " Did you expect two lads just landed in Penang to achieve single-handed the capture of the man who has been ' wanted ' by the authorities for years ? You must have a very low estimate of the ' Flying Dutchman's ' abilities, I'm afraid."

" Well, that's just what I did expect—there," replied Percy sturdily. " And I hoped you would get no end of credit——"

" And so I shall yet, thanks to you, old chap ; but you forget that this is not a one-horse show, and that by acting prematurely we may spoil our chance of bagging the whole gang—lock, stock, and barrel."

" Yes, there is something in that, certainly," admitted Percy, after a slight pause.

" Well, then, to resume my narrative. I found out about the three ships we were interested in. The first was a British-India passenger steamer, the second was a fruit boat bound for Rangoon, and the third turned out to be a local tramp plying between this and Sumatra."

" Sumatra ! " echoed Percy. " What port ? "

" Belawan—that is in the Deli district, al-

most due west from this. Like yourself, I was inclined to fix my suspicions on this boat—the *Lankat* it is called—especially as I had noticed that one of the three boats had sailed since last night."

"The *Lankat*?"

"No, it turned out to be the fruit boat that was missing; and later on, after consultation with my boss, a cable was sent to the police in Rangoon advising a strict search. A visit to the B.-I. steamer soon put her out of the count—our man was not on board, nor had any passage been booked from Penang. The *Lankat* had to be approached more warily. The Chinese company who own her have once or twice been in trouble with the authorities before, and it was necessary not to alarm them. Consequently, as I found out that she is not sailing for several days, I gave her a wide berth, and arranged with a boatman—a Chinaman in police pay—to visit her on some pretext, and find out if there is any European on board."

"And you—the police here—what steps are they taking?"

"Ah, that I am not permitted to divulge; but you may rest assured that we shall not be

idle. Colonel Fell is to see your father to-night, and discuss the matter with him. By-the-bye, you were quite right about your syce, Atjeh. It *was* he who followed us last night ; but Abdul was watching him all the time, and is positive he never left the front of the warehouse, and could not have known that we had been hiding on the quay. All the same, you will have to keep an eye on the fellow. These Achinese are dangerous customers."

" You bet I will," said Percy, with emphasis.  
" And now perhaps I should be getting home."

" No hurry. Mr. Alden will have your note. Better lie off here till tea and have a game at cricket later. There is to be a field practice to-day, and some of the Province Wellesley fellows are coming over for a knock."

This proposal was agreed to with alacrity, and after a snooze in long chairs and a refreshing cup of tea, the two friends strolled over to the cricket ground, where sides were picked, and a friendly match started at once. Percy had completed a dashing innings of thirty-four, and was leaving the wickets amidst the generous applause of his opponents, when a stout, choleric-faced old gentleman approached him, and inquired brusquely,—

"Are you young Alden?"

"Yes, my name is Alden. May I ask——"

"Ask? Allow *me* to ask what you mean by behaving like this? Leaving your home without a word, and allowing your father to worry himself——"

"That is not the case," interrupted Percy hotly. "I left a letter explaining my movements. But what you——"

"This is Dr. Boothby," interposed one of the players.

"What Dr. Boothby means by his interference I can't imagine, nor do I care to hear."

Indignant at being publicly rebuked by a stranger, Percy was stalking on with flushed face, when Dr. Boothby, in a not unkindly manner, caught him by the arm.

"Forgive me, my boy," he said in an altered tone. "I was too hasty, and there must have been some muddle about that letter; but I think you should come home with me now, at once."

"I can hardly do that," replied Percy, rather astonished at the doctor's persistence. "You see I've had my innings, and must take my turn at fielding. We'll be done about six, and——"

"Go on, then," retorted Dr. Boothby angrily.

"But don't blame me if you find your father worse."

"Worse!" echoed Percy, wheeling round sharply. "What is wrong? Is he ill?"

"Of course he's ill. But, bless me, of course you won't have heard if you've been away since last night. Here, Brinscombe—Lathom—I'm taking Alden off at once in my trap. You'll have to excuse him. The Resident has a touch of fever."

"Of course. That will be all right," responded the captain of his side at once, assisting Percy with his pads.

"I'll look in to-morrow," whispered Cecil, grasping his hand. "Don't be frightened; a touch of fever is nothing."

"What sort of fever is it?" inquired Percy anxiously, when he and his companion were in the buggy.

"Malarial. Just the usual dose; but your father has been rather run down lately, and is worrying over your absence. I must apologize again for my brusqueness; but Colonel Fell of the Police ruffled my temper—short at the best of times. He insisted on seeing the Resident against my advice—matter of urgent importance, he said—and, of course, your father

aided and abetted him. Duty first with him always, and hang the doctor."

"Oh, that's all right," responded Percy vaguely. "But I can't understand about that letter. I left it on the dressing-table in father's room."

"Very strange. Your father did not get home till near midnight, and went at once to bed, as he was not feeling well; but even then he could hardly have missed a letter left as you state. Early this morning I was sent for, as the Resident found himself in for a stiff dose of fever—temperature 103, sickness, and so forth."

"I wish I had known," exclaimed Percy, thinking with regret of the lazy manner in which he had spent the day.

"Tut, tut, never mind now. It can't be helped, and the sight of your face will relieve him more than all my medicine. Here we are. You had better come straight up with me. Softly now, in case he's asleep."

Throwing the reins to the syce, the doctor dismounted, and, treading cautiously, they ascended the stairs; but as they reached the veranda the Resident's voice was heard, calling anxiously,—

"Is that you, Boothby? Any news of my boy?"

"He's here safe and sound to answer for himself," answered the doctor cheerily, entering the room.

"Percy!"

"Dad!" Moving swiftly across the room, he took the hot, dry hand outstretched towards him and clasped it in both his own.

"Where have you been?"

"With Cecil, father. I left a letter explaining——"

"Some muddle of the Chinese boys," interrupted Dr. Boothby, seating himself by the bedside and taking the hand that Percy released. "No doubt it will turn up later, but we've got to checkmate this fever first. Um! Pulse quieter, that's good. How's the temperature?"

With the clinical thermometer between his teeth Mr. Alden was perforce silent, but Percy explained rapidly and as clearly as possible before a third person his movements for the past twenty-four hours.

"Time's up," exclaimed Dr. Boothby, taking the glass tube and holding it towards the lamp. "Ah! ha! My boy, what did I tell

you? The temperature is down already, but an overdose of you is not wanted. Say good-night now, and promise me not to see or talk to your father again to-night."

"Oh, but, doctor!"

"Now, now, Alden, don't try to wheedle me. You've had your way once to-day, and if I'm to look after you further I insist on obedience to my orders."

"I promise," said Percy, smiling and looking affectionately at his father.

"Good boy! Now, Alden, another dose of spirits of nitre, then under the blankets with you. I'll give your boy, Lie Hong, instructions for the night, and a better nurse you couldn't have."

"That's so," replied the Resident, gulping down the medicine and obediently pulling the blanket up to his neck; "it's not the first time Lie Hong has acted as sick nurse."

"I'll be round first thing in the morning," said Dr. Boothby, turning down the lamp.  
"Good-night."

"Thanks for your trouble, Boothby."

"Good-night, dad."

"Now, look here," said the doctor, while they waited under the porch for his trap,

"your father should be all right again in a day or two, but he must *not* talk shop to you or see that confounded Colonel Fell. Will you undertake this for me, or shall I hand the case over to Mullins—the gravedigger is the name he goes by."

"A truly pleasant name for a doctor," replied Percy, laughing, "but hardly encouraging. We'll stick to you, sir, if you'll accept my promise to obey your instructions as far as possible."

"Right! You look like a lad who would keep your word. Here's my trap. Salamat." And, clambering in, he disappeared down the drive.

Having bathed and changed, Percy descended to his lonely dinner, and the appearance of his own boy who attended him stirred the suspicions which had been lulled by anxiety on his father's account.

"Do you remember that I told you I had written a note for the Tuan Besar?" he asked casually.

"Yes, Tuan."

"Where is it, then? He says he never got it."

"I don't know, Tuan."

Percy turned a searching look full in the

yellow man's face, and it seemed to him that he detected a mocking gleam in the dull, slanting eyes of the Celestial.

"I don't know," he repeated, and then with a deferential gesture of the hands, added, "Perhaps the Tuan left the letter in his writing-case."

Percy was unable to restrain a smile at the attitude of guileless innocence adopted by Swee Hin, although he felt far from being assured of his sincerity.

"You're either very deep or very shallow, my fine fellow," he muttered to himself when left alone over the nuts. "I wonder, now, what you are after—you and Atjeh together. If only I could catch you out and be sure you were against us—" he yawned and stood up stretching himself. "Bed's the place after last night's steeplechase."

Listening at the Resident's door to make sure that all was well within, he crept into his own room and turned up the lamp. His glance happened to fall on the writing-case still lying on the table. He picked it up, meaning to replace it in his trunk, which he kept locked, and as he did so, Swee Hin's words recurred to him, and he smiled again.

"Just his way of hitting back, I suppose. He must be more fool than knave—By Jove!"

Quite idly he had pushed back the fastening of the case, the lid had fallen open, and there, shoved in the blotting pad, was the letter he had written and left in his father's room.

"By Jove!" Percy turned the letter round and round without being able to discover whether it had been opened. Swee Hin's words appealed to him now with new significance—"Perhaps the Tuan left it in his writing-case."

"Knaves as well as fools," muttered Percy, locking away the case; "but I've caught you out—I've caught you out."

## CHAPTER X.

### AT THE BUNGALOW.

NEXT day Dr. Boothby pronounced the Resident free from fever. He still, however, refused to allow the transaction of any business, insisting on complete rest and a trip up the Hill as the only efficacious tonic.

"It's the best place for you," he insisted, shaking his head at Mr. Alden's remonstrances, "much the best place. Take Percy here with you, leave work and worry behind you for a week, and you'll come down to us again feeling a new man."

"Yes do, father," urged Percy. "You must get well soon. Remember you promised to take me over some time this month for a shot at the sladang."

The Resident, after a show of resistance, gave in, smiling.

"Two to one—and a sick man at that—is

hardly fair," he protested ; " but for the sake of a quiet life, I suppose I must submit. It is very awkward leaving my post at the present time, but I think a bare week might be managed. If the fever keeps off, we'll start early to-morrow, before the heat of the day."

Dr. Boothby suggested that the ascent might be postponed for a day or two longer ; but the Resident insisted that it should be next day or not at all, and at length the doctor realized that he was determined to have things his own way.

" Well, well, please yourself," he concluded, shrugging his shoulders ; " but you must promise me not to transact business beyond what is absolutely necessary."

" I promise willingly—for a week."

" And after that you will be at it harder than ever, eh ? I know your ways, but luckily you have a magnificent constitution and—"

" A very clever doctor," interpolated Percy slyly.

" Eh, what's that ? Clever doctor ? Well, maybe, maybe ; but don't you waste your time on flattery, young man. You'll have to hustle if your father's bungalow up the Hill is to be ready for you to-morrow morning. You'll

need warm clothing, mind. The air up there is sharp. I'll arrange about a comfortable chair to meet you at the foot. What time would suit?"

"Say 7.30."

"Very well. I'll look in again this evening. Salamat!"

Percy soon found that the doctor had been right in warning him to make haste with his preparations. Mr. Alden gave him a few general directions as to what should be done, and then purposely left the rest to his son. All morning the latter was busy arranging which of the servants should go and which remain, what stores would be required at the bungalow, what was to be done with the Resident's letters, and so on. In the afternoon a stream of callers arrived, having heard of Mr. Alden's illness, and at his father's request Percy saw each of them for a few minutes and assured them that the attack was slight, and intimated that Dr. Boothby had prescribed a week's rest up the Hill. Luckily Lie Hong had been at the bungalow with his master several times before, and rendered able assistance in many ways, but it was with a feeling of profound relief that the lad hailed

the doctor's advent after dinner, and submitted his plans and arrangements for his approval.

"I think you have managed wonderfully," commented Dr. Boothby, "and I am glad you thought of sending an oppas up to-day to open the bungalow and have it thoroughly aired. I'll be round first thing in the morning to give a hand. Your father was free from fever and going to sleep when I left him just now, so you had better not disturb him again this evening."

"Certainly not. Thanks so much for arranging about the chairs. How long does it take to climb the Hill?"

"Nearly an hour. Remember what I told you before about warm clothing. You'll find the air distinctly chilly after this sweltering heat. Now, if you will call my syce, I shall be off home."

Having bidden the doctor good-night, Percy was about to turn in when the telephone bell in the office began ringing.

"Hullo! Who's that?" he asked, taking down the receiver.

"Brinscombe. Is that you, Percy?"

"Yes, what's the news?"

"Not much so far, and distinctly limited over the telephone. It appears that our man left again after boarding a certain vessel. Can't say more, but we're hopeful. How's Mr. Alden?"

"Better. We are going up the Hill tomorrow morning for a week. When can I see you again?"

"Not till you come back, I'm afraid. Have you been able to talk things over with the Resident yet?"

"No. Dr. Boothby won't allow any business or 'shop,' and I feel that perhaps I ought to have told him before he goes up the Hill."

"Don't worry about that. Your father knows already. My boss went straight to him after I had told him about our discoveries."

"Father knows!" exclaimed Percy, his mind much relieved. "I had an idea he had heard something, but wasn't sure, and felt rather uneasy about the matter."

"Well, don't you worry. He knows all right, and has probably left things pretty well in the hands of my chief. Be sure you come and see me whenever you leave the Hill."

"I will—certainly. And don't forget to

let me know anything that turns up, old man, will you?"

"No. Why, bless me, it's your game really. You put us on the scent. I'll keep you posted. *Au revoir.*"

"Good-bye."

Percy hung up the receiver, feeling immensely relieved in his mind. All day he had been worrying over the thought that his father would leave his post in ignorance of the important facts that had come to light, and yet he shrank from the risk he ran in disobeying Dr. Boothby's warnings. If his father knew, then all was well, and no blame could attach to him for following medical advice. He listened at his father's door in passing, and from the sound of regular breathing, which was distinctly audible, concluded that he was sleeping soundly. Passing on quietly, he slipped into his room, the door of which was ajar, and he was in the act of closing it again when he stopped suddenly. The lighted lamp was standing on a table over against the opposite partition, and near it, bending over a half-packed suit case, stood the Chinese boy, Swee Hin. He had evidently been completing the preparations for to-morrow, as became his

office, but in such a manner as to cause the English lad some astonishment. As Percy entered, the boy lifted an old Norfolk jacket off the table and, holding it up before him, proceeded to search the pockets systematically. Not content with the negative result of this investigation, he was proceeding to feel the linings carefully, when a slight sound attracted his attention. With a swift turn of the head he perceived his master, but not a muscle of his face betrayed any sign of confusion or surprise.

"What are you doing with that jacket?" demanded Percy, closing the door and advancing into the room.

"I was about to put it in the box, Tuan, but found that a button was missing."

He turned the jacket round as he spoke, and sure enough a button was missing.

"So I see," retorted Percy; "but that was no reason why you should search the pockets."

"The lining also requires mending," was the calm reply, and, turning a pocket inside out, Swee Hin exposed a large hole in the lining.

"I understand," admitted the baffled Percy. "You can go now, and finish packing to-morrow morning."

"Very good, Tuan," and, tucking the Norfolk jacket under his arm, Swee Hin made to descend the bathroom stairs.

"What are you taking that for?" demanded his master.

"To mend it for the Tuan," was the glib reply.

"Put it down at once."

After a moment's hesitation the boy obeyed, and with a vicious sidelong look out of his slanting eyes, disappeared quickly down the steep steps. Startled by the malevolence of the glance which he had observed, Percy waited until he heard the door close and steps retreating on the stone steps outside, then, slipping off his shoes, he ran lightly down to the bathroom and carefully shot the bolts.

"That feels safer," he muttered as he returned slowly to his room. "What a fiendish villain you looked for a second, Mister Swee Hin! You've got a spite against me for some reason, though what it is——"

His eye fell on the Norfolk jacket lying on the table, and lifting it he held it up for inspection. "You're evidently connected with the business too," he continued with a puzzled frown, proceeding to thrust his hands into

the pockets. "No, there's no clue there, and I give it up for the night. I'm too sleepy to think hard. Given a Sherlock Holmes, no doubt this blessed garment would lead to the unravelling of the mystery in two ticks. It's easy enough. As Richellmann is to Souza and Souza is to Atjeh and Atjeh to Swee Hin, so is this coat to *x*. Bah ! how I'm drivelling ; but really this continual sense of playing blind man in a mystery is getting on my nerves."

He flung the jacket down and proceeded to undress. Then, thrusting his revolver under his pillow, he jumped into bed and, drawing the mosquito curtain close, speedily fell asleep.

Next morning he awoke with a start to find that although it was not yet six o'clock and still dark, the household was already astir. Springing out of bed, he made a hasty toilet, and then visited his father, whom he found free of fever and much refreshed by his long slumber. Before descending for breakfast, Percy took the precaution of completing his own packing, locking the suit case and pocketing the key. Just as he had finished his meal Dr. Boothby drove up to the door, and together they went up to see if the Resident was ready to make a start.

"No need to ask how you feel this morning," remarked the doctor, after a glance at his patient and a touch of his pulse. "Percy has acted as nurse and tonic combined, with excellent results."

"You're right. I feel ever so much better to-day, and quite ready to be off when it suits you."

"Then call the carriage, my lad, while I give your father an arm downstairs. We shall dodge old Sol's warm attentions if we make a move now."

The Resident proved wonderfully steady on his legs, considering his sharp attack of fever, and all three enjoyed the drive in the sweet coolness of the morning. At the foot of the Hill coolies with chairs were waiting, and after seeing Mr. Alden safely ensconced and comfortably disposed, Dr. Boothby took his leave.

"See that the Resident goes straight to bed on his arrival, and don't let him do a stroke of work," were his last injunctions to Percy as the latter seated himself somewhat uneasily in his chair and gave the word to march.

Mr. Alden, as an invalid, was carried reclining in a lounge chair by four coolies ; but the ordinary conveyance in which his son was seated was simply an upright wicker chair,

with a small platform for the feet. A stout bamboo projected on each side before and behind, and two coolies supplied the motive power. The one in front held the two poles in his hands, the one in the rear carried them on his shoulders. In this manner the passenger was carried on the level, for so winding and tortuous was the track that the gradient was never so steep as to be uncomfortable. By the time the half-way house was reached Percy had grown quite accustomed to the motion, and, indeed, was feeling rather drowsy. So thickly was the path shut in by trees and the luxuriant undergrowth that few glimpses of scenery were possible, and shortly after the ascent was resumed they entered a thick mist which still crowned the Hill. Percy was glad enough when the summit was reached at last, and through the wide open door of the bungalow the glow of a cheery fire greeted their arrival.

" You hardly expected this sort of thing in the tropics, eh, Percy ? " queried Mr. Alden, sinking into a chair comfortably, and stretching his feet towards the hearth. " When our boys bring up the bags you should change into flannels or something warm."

"I think I shall," answered Percy, warming his hands. "But which is your room? I ordered them to have it ready, and Dr. Boothby made me promise to get you to bed at once."

"I generally use that room in there," replied his father, indicating a door opposite, "and they will probably put you next me. Now that I am warm again, I shall obey orders, and turn in till tea-time. If you find time hanging heavily on your hands, go across to the Crag Hotel, and you're sure to find some nice boys and girls who will have a game at tennis."

Having helped his father into bed and received his assurance that he was feeling none the worse for his "flitting," Percy proceeded to inspect his own room and the rest of the house. While he was thus engaged the appearance of the sun, which had dispersed the mist, tempted him outside. He stepped on to the veranda, and suddenly drew in his breath as the glorious view burst on him. The Hill, over two thousand feet high, and deeply wooded, seemed to drop sheer down to the road and gardens far below. Little wisps of mist still clung to the trees here and there, adding somehow to the great sense of depth. The

town of Penang lay farther off, shining white in the blazing sun, and the Residency was clearly discernible, with the hospital just beyond it. A silver thread of water separated the island from the mainland, and then the land stretched south and west, bounded only by the far distant hills. South also gleamed the Straits of Malacca, and west to the horizon shone the waters of the Indian Ocean, a dark streak of smoke indicating the passing of some great liner from Singapore. Eagerly inhaling the sweet fresh air, the lad strolled round the trim little garden, in which the roses were growing in great profusion. About a hundred yards away he noticed a big building covered with creepers, and with several tennis courts laid out close by. This he took to be the Crag Hotel, of which his father had spoken. Returning to the veranda, he pulled a long chair into the sun, and lay quietly enjoying the cool breeze and gorgeous panorama. By one o'clock he felt fit for a hearty tiffin, and then, after a visit to Mr. Alden's room, he walked over to the hotel to see if he could get a game at tennis. About five o'clock he came back whistling in great spirits to join his father over a cup of tea in the hall.

"Glad to see you up again and looking so fit, dad," he remarked cheerily.

"Oh, I'm quite convalescent now," replied Mr. Alden, smiling, "and will soon pick up in this exhilarating air. Did you have a good game?"

"Ripping," said Percy enthusiastically, pouring out a cup of tea for himself. "There's a young planter, Rogers, who's quite good, and two jolly girls—Smeaton by name—who are very keen. Oh—er—yes, and De Souza is staying there at the hotel. He came up today also, it seems."

"Ah!" remarked his father quietly, "you and I must have a talk about him—and other matters, Percy."

"I promised Dr. Boothby——"

Mr. Alden held up his hand.

"This is a matter in which I must judge for myself," he said firmly, "and no considerations of personal health can be allowed to intervene. I obeyed the doctor's injunctions while under his care; but now—I want you to tell me in your own words exactly what took place that night you slept at Brinscombe's house."

Percy understood at once the change in his father's voice, and realized it was the Resident

who was addressing him in tones of authority. Gulping down his third cup, he sat a minute considering where he should begin, and then plunged into his story. Now and again Mr. Alden would interpose with a question ; but for the most part the narrative was straightforward and intelligible, and when it was finished Mr. Alden nodded his approval.

“ Yes, that coincides exactly with the story Colonel Fell told me, and we have every reason to thank you and Brinscombe for discovering so much. Another plot is evidently coming to a head, and this time it must be frustrated. Either that, or——” He paused, and gazed dreamily out southwards over the quiet Straits.

“ Or what ? ” queried Percy, shivering in spite of himself.

“ I must hand in my resignation.”

Mr. Alden spoke quietly, almost indifferently, as though his thoughts were elsewhere ; but next instant he pulled himself together with an obvious effort.

“ Why are you shivering ? You should have changed into something warmer, as I asked you. Go now and put on a coat while I get the fire lighted. There are one or two points about this business we must talk over.”

" Right, dad."

Although the air was turning distinctly chilly it was not that which had caused the lad to shiver involuntarily, but rather a curious feeling of impending danger and foreboding caused by his father's words. Shaking off the impression, he dived into his room, and, unlocking his suit case, pulled out the old Norfolk jacket which lay on the top.

" By Jove ! " he muttered, " that's another little problem for the pater to solve. The sooner the better, too."

Hurriedly donning the coat, he made his way back into the hall, where he found his boy, Swee Hin, busily engaged in coaxing the fire to burn. As Percy entered the Chinaman rose, his task accomplished.

" Getting dark now; we'd better have a light," suggested Mr. Alden. " Boy, bring the lamps."

" Look here, father," began Percy, in a low voice, immediately the boy had withdrawn, " I've something more to tell you—about that chap Swee Hin and this old coat I'm wearing."

" What on earth do you mean ? "

" I hardly know myself, and yet it may be connected with the other affair," and Percy

proceeded to detail his boy's curious proceedings of the previous night.

"I can't make head or tail of it," was Mr. Alden's remark at the conclusion. "We must overhaul the coat thoroughly when the light comes."

"There's nothing special about it," replied Percy, thrusting his hands into the side pockets and throwing the coat open. "I've searched it carefully, and—hullo!"

In his energy he had forced his hand right through the torn lining of one of the pockets, and his fingers came in contact with a paper.

"There's something here after all," he exclaimed, fumbling in his excitement. "What on earth can it be? Not a cheque, surely. The jacket's an old one of Cecil's he gave me when he left school. Here it is, anyway."

"Certainly not a cheque," remarked Mr. Alden, bending over a crumpled piece of paper which at last made its appearance through the torn lining, "nor a bank note. It seems merely a blank sheet of paper." He turned it over and peered at it once more. "Stay—it's almost impossible to make out anything in the dark, but I think there seems to be writing on this side. Where is that boy with the lights?"

Percy took the paper handed to him, and examined it by the fitful flicker of the fire.

"Yes, there's writing on it," he exclaimed, "and I think it must be an old letter. It begins, 'My dear—' I can't catch the name."

"Never mind. Here is the lamp, and we shall soon see."

Swee Hin placed the lamp on the centre of the table in the room and turned to go, when Percy suddenly gave vent to an exclamation of surprise.

"Why, it's the lost letter—De Souza's letter that I found long ago at school!"

He looked across at his father with a puzzled, almost disappointed expression.

"You can go," announced the Resident sharply to Swee Hin, who had stopped, and was gazing at the letter the English lad held in his hand. "Quick, now."

"Very good, Tuan," replied the boy meekly, retreating noiselessly.

"It's a pity you found that letter just before that fellow entered," remarked Mr. Alden. "He does seem to be connected with it somehow, because I saw him steal a glance at your jacket, and when you sang out he wheeled round as if he had spotted something."

"It was awfully stupid of me," said Percy in a tone of vexation; "but really I was so surprised when I recognized what I held in my hand that I couldn't help myself. Just fancy," he went on rapidly, "this is the very letter we had such a row about at school. You remember, I told you about it. And to think it has been in this old Norfolk jacket all the time!"

"How do you account for it?"

"It is hard to say. Cecil took the letter when De Souza refused to apologize to me, and probably stuck it into the pocket of this jacket. It must have got into the lining through the tear, and so he overlooked it when he handed the coat over to me. How often Suzie inquired for the letter, and how often Cecil and I assured him it had been lost!"

He laughed at the recollection; but the Resident looked grave and thoughtful as he stroked his beard.

"And now," concluded Percy ruefully, "I shall have to own up and hand it over to De Souza."

"Give me the letter," said Mr. Alden at length, holding out his hand; adding, as he

saw his son hesitated, " You can trust me, Percy."

" Of course, dad," responded the lad quickly, handing over the missive. " I only wanted to be able to assure De Souza that it had not been read by any one."

" I quite understand, my boy, and only matters of very grave urgency would force me to do otherwise. Even now I am not quite convinced that my way is clear, and before coming to a decision I want you to tell me again very fully the history of this letter and of your voyage out to Penang."

Percy complied with alacrity. The sight of the letter had brought back to his memory with great vividness every detail of his unexpected quarrel with De Souza. He saw again the old gray walls of the school, the groups of boys strolling about, and recalled anew the amazement he experienced over the sudden assault. So clearly did his memory picture the events of that day, that when he had narrated the finding of De Souza lying hurt at the foot of the wall he repeated almost word for word Brinscombe's subsequent remarks about the open window and the burst portmanteau.

"I remember now that Cecil was rather keen on the point," he repeated, "though I laughed at the idea at the time. From that day till this the letter disappeared; but De Souza asked about it continually, and worried my life out till I shut him up. After that nothing occurred until I went on board—no, I'm wrong, by Jove! It has nothing to do with the letter directly, but the fact is, I met De Souza in London, and he seemed awfully anxious to know what ship I was sailing in, and insisted on knowing."

The speaker went on to recount the chance meeting in London, and then proceeded to describe again the incidents of the voyage down to his arrival at the Residency.

When he had finished there was a long silence. Mr. Alden, with the folded letter in his left hand, gazed thoughtfully into the fire. Once or twice he looked across at Percy, as though about to speak; but evidently thinking better of it, resumed his cogitations. Just as the dinner-gong sounded he appeared to come to some decision.

"I shall take the night to think over this business," he said finally. "After dinner I must lie down as I promised Dr. Boothby, and

as I shall probably fall asleep, you had better not look in when you go to your room. For the present let us dismiss serious thoughts from our minds and go and have our dinner. This keen air is giving me quite an appetite already."

All through the meal the Resident was in the gayest spirits, and entertained Percy to some of his old school and university reminiscences. Just before the Chinese boys left them to the fruit, however, Mr. Alden leant across the table, and remarked quite loudly and distinctly,—

"I shall keep that letter myself to-night."

Percy, much astonished, glanced quickly round at the servants ; and seeing his look, his father smiled.

"There may be method in my madness after all, my boy," he said, rising from the table.  
"I'm off now to bed. Good-night."

Percy, who had a keen appreciation for the many Eastern fruits, stayed on some little time sampling the various varieties on the table ; then, going into the other room, he drew up a lounge chair to the fire, and, sipping his coffee, fell into a reverie. Some one was playing coon songs up at the hotel, and the quaint

tunes awakened old memories. He seemed to drift back to the old schooldays, and imagined himself leading the chorus. The tune ended amidst a loud clapping of hands, and, pulling himself together, he sat upright, yawning.

"Almost asleep," he muttered, stretching himself. "This sharp air makes me quite drowsy, and I may as well turn in."

Turning out the lamp, he went softly past his father's door to his own room, and in five minutes he was lying snugly under the bed-clothes. Through the open window the cool breeze wafted the strains of an old, well-known waltz.

"Sweet dreamland faces," mumbled Percy drowsily. Abruptly his mind cleared, and he lay alert collecting his thoughts. Surely the music had stopped very suddenly. Not a sound broke the stillness, save the sighing of the breeze in the trees in the garden. "I must have fallen asleep," he muttered, turning comfortably on his side. "Hullo! what was that?" He raised his head and listened. "Something moved," he assured himself, growing hot with excitement. "I'm sure something moved. There it is again!"

Sitting bolt upright, he waited motionless for

what might follow. Nor had he long to wait. A light touch on his door, as of fingers stealthily feeling the way, was followed by the cautious turning of a door handle. The noise of a heavy fall was followed by an exclamation from Mr. Alden. Through the partition came the sound of a desperate struggle, and next instant Percy was up and out of the room.

## CHAPTER XI.

### THE MISSING LETTER.

FLINGING open the door, Percy dashed into his father's room, to fall sprawling headlong over a confused heap struggling on the floor.

"Dad!" he called anxiously, jumping up, "where are you? Are you hurt?"

"I'm—all right," gasped a voice. "Get a light."

Hastening to his own room, Percy lost a minute fumbling for the matches, and then the lamp needed some coaxing.

"Quick!" he heard Mr. Alden say suddenly. "Quick, or he'll get away."

Seizing the light, he darted back, eager to join the fray, but on the threshold was compelled to pause, hesitating where to place the lamp. His father, in pyjamas and dressing-gown, was wrestling with Swee Hin, whose

only article of clothing was a loin cloth. Mr. Alden, much the bigger and stronger of the two men, was endeavouring merely to hold the other a prisoner, but the turning and twisting of his captive forced him to offensive tactics. Even as Percy appeared, he was compelled to shift his grip for a firmer hold. Letting go with his right hand, he made a dive for the yellow man's pigtail. Like a flash the Chinaman saw his opportunity and took it. Ducking quickly, he butted his head in the Resident's stomach, and an instant later buried his teeth in the hand which still gripped his shoulder.

"Look out! he'll be off!" shouted Percy, and then setting the lamp on the ground, he made a dive forward. Too late! With a quick swerve, the lithe yellow figure eluded his grasp and sprang for the window. Percy followed, only to receive a kick on the mouth which sent him staggering backwards. There was a crash, a tinkling of fallen glass, and then silence.

"He's got clean away," muttered Percy angrily, wiping his bleeding lip. "Did he hurt you, dad?"

"No-o," gasped Mr. Alden, seating himself

on the bed and breathing heavily. "Winded me a bit; all right in a minute."

Vexed and angry at the Chinaman's escape, the lad picked up the lamp and set it on the table. A cursory examination showed that the Resident's hand was not seriously injured, and after a thorough cleaning it was carefully bound up. Having seen that his father was not really hurt, the comical side of the affair suddenly struck Percy, and he burst out laughing.

"Ugh!" he exclaimed, wincing, and putting his hand to his mouth. "I owe the wretch one for that kick; but really, dad, it *is* funny to think of that little beggar getting the best of us."

"I suppose it is," said Mr. Alden, smiling rather ruefully at his lacerated hand. "And after all I am not sorry that he got away. His presence here gave me all the information required."

"What information? What did Swee Hin want in your room?"

"It's a long story," replied the Resident, "and some points are not clear; but I hope to be able to explain it all to you to-morrow. Do you know what time it is? Four o'clock."

"Are you not going to call the oppas, and search for Swee Hin?"

"No, let him go. And now, if you don't mind, I'll turn in again, and advise you to do the same. You're not afraid to sleep by yourself after this affair? Swee Hin won't come back to-night, I am certain."

"Come back? I only wish he would," said Percy grimly, picking up the lamp. "But it doesn't seem likely. I can see you've struck something, and want to worry it out by yourself. I'll be eager to hear all about it to-morrow. Good-night again—or rather good-morning."

"Good-night," responded Mr. Alden, laying his hand affectionately on his son's shoulder. "You'll learn everything I can tell you in the morning. It was plucky of you to come to my assistance so promptly, my boy, and I am very proud of you."

"Oh, that was nothing," said Percy confusedly, but delighted all the same with the quiet praise. "I love a scrap, and any fellow would surely help his father."

Long after he had returned to bed Percy lay awake trying to solve the mystery that hung round the whole affair, and though it was more than an hour before he fell asleep, he could tell by the rustling of papers and an occasional

movement from the next room that his father was still out of bed and engaged at some work.

The sun was streaming in at the window when he awoke—to find his father's Chinese boy standing at his bedside with a letter in his hand.

"Hullo! Where's Swee Hin?" he asked lazily, stretching himself.

"Swee Hin has run away, Tuan," replied the Chinaman in a matter-of-fact tone of voice, as though recounting an everyday occurrence.

"Run away? Oh—ah, yes, of course he has," responded Percy confusedly, involuntarily raising his hand to his swollen lip as he recalled Swee Hin's disappearance through the broken window. Being uncertain as to Mr. Alden's attitude towards the whole affair, he thought it wiser not to pursue the subject further. Bidding the Chinaman prepare his bath, he tore open the letter, which bore the Singapore postmark.

"Hollands!" he exclaimed, glancing over the hasty scribble. "What stroke of fortune has brought him here? Oh, he's off again, bad luck!"

After a characteristic scrawl of a few lines announcing the arrival of his ship at Singapore,

the middy added a postscript : " We sail again in three hours under sealed orders. Something up. Hurrah ! "

" Something up ! There generally is when you're anywhere about, my friend," chuckled Percy to himself. " I only wish you were coming up here to join the fun. What a grand time you and Cecil and I would have laying the gun-runners by the heels ! "

With such pleasant thoughts running in his head, Percy finished his toilet, and joined Mr. Alden at the breakfast-table.

" Good-morning again, dad. None the worse of your encounter last night ? "

" Not a bit," replied Mr. Alden, looking up and smiling. " Later on"—and he gave a look at the Chinese boy in attendance—" I have something to tell you as the sequel."

" Right oh ! I savvy," nodded Percy, seating himself, and commencing a vigorous onslaught on the viands. " I've had news myself, too, this morning. Hollands—the middy I bunked with coming out—writes from Singapore that his ship has just arrived, but sails in three hours under sealed orders."

" I'm glad to hear that—very glad," said Mr. Alden quietly, with a sigh almost of relief.

" You're glad ! " repeated Percy in astonishment. " Why—what's it got to do with you ? "

" That will be explained along with the rest," answered the Resident, smiling at his son's perplexed look. " But in the meantime here is some news you will readily appreciate." He tapped a letter lying open by his plate. " This is from Captain Nicholson, in Province Wellesley, asking us to go over and have a shot at sladang. What do you say ? "

" I'm on, rather ! When shall we go, and what is a sladang ? "

" A sladang is a kind of buffalo, one of the fiercest and wildest beasts on earth. It stands nearly as high, and over rough ground is as fleet, as a horse. To secure a sladang's horns is a feather in the cap of the best sportsman, and if it were not for the fact that Captain Nicholson's reputation stands high as a shikari, I would not let you go."

" But you are coming too, aren't you ? "

" What about doctor's orders now ? "

" Oh, bother, I forgot ; but it won't be half the fun if you don't come."

" I've long wished for a chance to bag a sladang," said Mr. Alden, " and it is strange that the opportunity should come at last just

when I can't take advantage of it. However, you will, no doubt, act the part equally well."

"But my rifle. Where——"

"Nicholson offers to supply rifles and everything necessary. Now," continued the speaker, rising from the table, "if you will come into my study I think I can clear up some of the points which have been puzzling us."

Giving Lie Hung instructions that he was on no account to be disturbed, the Resident led the way to the study, and having motioned Percy to a seat, carefully filled his pipe and proceeded to light it.

"I read that letter last night," he began abruptly.

"You read it!" exclaimed Percy.

He had no doubt what letter was referred to, but felt surprised that his father should evince so much interest in such a petty affair.

"Yes, I read it," repeated Mr. Alden slowly, "and it clears up much of the mystery. Let me recall the facts from the beginning. You found this letter lying in the pavilion, and De Souza found you with it in your hand. To your astonishment, he appeared greatly excited, and actually struck you. Brinscombe took charge of the letter until De Souza should

apologize, but ultimately mislaid it. Is that correct?"

"Yes," assented Percy, still wondering. "But you must remember that Suzie was wild with me at the time over the football business."

"That is so, and no doubt to a fellow of his nature it proved a further incentive; but what struck me most on hearing your story was the fact that from that day on there occurred a series of strange and, taken altogether, suspicious circumstances. First of all, De Souza is found below your open window with a sprained ankle, and Brinscombe hints that his portmanteau has been ransacked. The half-caste keeps worrying you about the letter, and, while plainly disliking you, makes cordial inquiries as to what boat you are sailing by. He ascertains this, and then no sooner are you aboard than your fellow-passenger takes up the *rôle* of spy. Not content with a casual survey, he manages to get you left behind at Port Said, so that he can have ample time for a thorough search—a plan evidently frustrated by your untimely reappearance at Ismailia."

"Was that what he was after?" exclaimed Percy. "But why—"

Mr. Alden stopped his questioning by a gesture.

"Let me piece my theories together in my own way first," he protested, "and follow them to a conclusion."

He puffed away in silence for a few minutes, and then recommenced his narrative.

"Up till your arrival in Penang you had no reason for attaching any particular significance to the incidents which had occurred; but when the identity of your quondam berth-fellow, Richellmann, was disclosed, matters began to assume a different aspect. Even at that time, as I think I told you, I had vague suspicions that you personally were an object of interest to the 'Flying Dutchman' and his friends. Then followed various episodes, culminating in the discovery of De Souza's complicity in the mischief plotted. From the moment I heard that," continued the Resident, watching the smoke from his pipe meditatively, "I felt that we were very close to the heart of the mystery. Your remark about De Souza following us up here, coupled with your account of Swee Hin's eccentric ongoingings with your old Norfolk jacket, seemed but necessary links in the chain. The discovery of the long-lost letter proved the

soundness of my surmise, and your boy's behaviour fitted in exactly. Further proof seemed almost superfluous, but as a final test it was interesting. You were surprised last night when I announced at dinner that I would keep the letter in my room ? ”

“ Surprised ? I should rather think I was,” replied Percy emphatically.

Mr. Alden smiled.

“ You certainly looked it,” he admitted ; “ but there was method in my madness after all. You remember that I told you that Swee Hin had been engaged for you mainly because he spoke no English ? Well, his lipas certainly bore this statement ; but putting two and two together I made quiet inquiries through Colonel Fell, with the result that the total was found to amount exactly to—four. In plain English, the lipas was forged, and the boy came from De Souza.”

“ De Souza ! What a blackguard the chap is.”

“ Needless to say, after the discovery, Mr. Swee Hin was pretty closely watched ; but Colonel Fell agreed with me that the best plan was to keep the matter quiet, even from you, and allow the Chinaman to commit himself and his allies. The occasion presented

itself last night in connection with this letter. I seized this opportunity and gave Swee Hin an invitation, which he was not slow in accepting, as you yourself witnessed."

"But how—what does it mean?" queried Percy, quite bewildered.

"It means simply that De Souza has been at the bottom of the plot against you. Swee Hin was employed as his spy, and the cause of trouble from the first has been this letter which you picked up at school after the football match."

Percy stood up suddenly.

"I'll go over to the hotel now," he announced gravely, "and give De Souza the biggest licking he ever had in his life."

"You needn't worry," was the quiet response; "the last thing we want is to give ourselves away to the other side, and physical violence isn't necessary. This gives me all the information required to send De Souza to penal servitude."

He pulled the long-lost letter from his pocket and handed it over to his son.

"Shall I read it?" asked the latter, still hesitating.

"Certainly."

With clumsy fingers Percy opened the incriminating document, eager to get to the heart of the mystery. As he read, a puzzled expression crept into his face, and when he had finished he looked up at his father with a look of blank amazement.

"I can make nothing out of this," he said, in a disappointed tone, "it sounds innocent and straightforward enough."

Mr. Alden smiled.

"That is exactly what it is intended to do," he replied calmly, "and at first I was as disappointed as you, but by a lucky accident I hit on the real, hidden meaning. Read it again, aloud, and I shall explain what I mean."

Percy complied, reading the letter slowly and deliberately. It ran as follows:—

"MY DEAR SON,

"*You* must have been wondering why I did not indite a letter before this date, but trade has been brisk, and prosperity brings its own difficulties to the fortunate.

"We *are* looking forward to your success, which seems imminent, and I congratulate you and your friend Mr. Assinder, to whom I am writing also.

" K. has *authorized* the transaction, and will shortly visit friends in the East.

" I am unable *to* state yet what ship will be available, but will make arrangements later.

" We have had an *order* from the Government, which demonstrates their faith in our house.

" This consists of more than 1,000 complete outfits for the Sikhs here in garrison.

" We shall certainly push your friend's *rifles* to our mutual advantage, as you request, though sportsmen generally bring guns out with them.

" I am to-day forwarding to the Bank *as usual* your remittance, which please acknowledge.

" In your last communication I note that you *mentioned* that two of your schoolfellows were coming out, one of them the son of the Resident. This may help.

" Do you think you can find out immediately what *shipment* of soft goods our agents in London are sending this month ?

" We have mislaid their invoice by mischance, and are unwilling *to* cable them on such a trivial matter.

" Do not insure your luggage. We have a general policy in *Penang* which will cover any loss.

" If there is any difficulty about the shipment, wire me in cipher *C.*, and we shall understand.

" Many passengers coming East now prefer the Japanese mail to the *P.* and *O.* or German line, but you can please yourself.

" Now, my dear son, I shall conclude. Hoping very soon to see you, *D.V.*, as our pastor says.

" I remain

" Your affectionate father,

" P. DE SOUZA."

" I see you are still puzzled," said the Resident, when Percy had finished, " and no wonder. The letter is in cipher ; quite a simple one, but hard to guess for all that. It took me several hours to discover the key, and it was only by an accident, as I said before, that I hit upon it then. As you will notice, there are a lot of single capital letters towards the conclusion, and after several vain attempts at a solution, I concentrated my attention on these. *C.* is the first, then *P.* and *O.*, and later *D.V.* After shuffling them about in various ways, I found that the only intelligible arrangement included three, *C.O.D.* in the order named. This stands, as you know, for the business term

*Cash on Delivery*, and this was something at any rate to work on. After much puzzling, I noticed that each of these three letters occurred in a separate paragraph, and assuming that each paragraph contained one word of the hidden message, my task was thereby much lessened. At first I tried to construct a sentence haphazard, picking the likeliest words, but that proved hopeless, and I started counting the words in each paragraph. In this way I discovered that C. was the 13th word, O. the 14th, and D. the 15th in its sentence. This seemed hardly likely to be altogether a coincidence, and I elaborated the system, beginning at paragraph one, taking the first word, paragraph two the second, and so on. If you will look at the letter again you will see what I mean. I put the words down as I counted them out, and when I had finished the cipher message lay before me revealed."

"What was it?" asked Percy eagerly, abandoning the effort to pick it out for himself from the letter.

"It is concise and business-like, and runs as follows:—

"You are authorized to order 1,000 rifles as mentioned. Shipment to Penang. C.O.D."

For a moment there was silence as father and son gazed at each other ; and then Percy leapt to his feet and clapped Mr. Alden excitedly on the back.

" Hurrah ! dad, you've got them," he exclaimed, all in a breath. " What are you going to do now ? Clap 'em all in gaol ? "

" Gently, gently, my boy," laughed the Resident, evading the friendly blows ; " your thoughts and actions are apt to run away with you."

" I can't help it," replied Percy, resuming his seat nevertheless ; " it's just splendid the way you've worked out that cipher and caught out the Souza crowd."

" The deciphering was a mere stroke of luck, and, after all, even that couldn't have happened unless you had picked up the letter. By-the-bye, who is this Assinder who is mentioned ? "

" Oh, a regular rotter. A beastly cad and great friend of De Souza's. His father—why, of course, that's part of the whole thing too—his father was a Birmingham man, and made guns ! "

" Durie, Assinder, and Co. I fancied the name was familiar," commented Mr. Alden

quietly. " Well, you will understand now why Richellmann paid you and your luggage so much attention, and also why he has honoured us with a visit. This consignment of rifles is evidently due very shortly, or he would not have run the risk of detection. To capture him red-handed is our task, and even before the discovery of this letter we had come to the conclusion that another attempt at gun-running was about to be made. To assist us in intercepting the cargo, I sent a wireless message to the Governor at Singapore, and it is in response to my appeal that your friend Hollands's ship has been sent north."

" Good old Hollands ! I hope he will get them. How excited he'll be."

" I don't suppose Midshipman Hollands will be told much of the project," replied the Resident dryly ; " and you must understand that all I am saying to you now is under the strictest secrecy. If anything leaks out our whole plan may fail, and——"

" It won't fail because of me, dad," burst out Percy enthusiastically. " I won't speak a word ; but can't I take a hand myself? "

Mr. Alden smiled.

" I think you have taken a pretty prominent

part already, haven't you? This letter strengthens our position immensely, and your detective work with Brinscombe was also of considerable value. I want you now to carry a message for me, and that is why this invitation to shoot sladang comes in opportunely."

"Sladang shooting! How does that help?"

"Let me explain. You must have realized by this time that we are surrounded by spies—Swee Hin, for example. Everything we do—any action on my part in particular—is reported to the enemy's headquarters. At first it seemed that my attack of fever was a misfortune; but I have come to the conclusion that my retreat to the Hill may lull the gun-runners into a false sense of security. That being so, all we have to do is to avoid raising suspicions, and they may fall blindly into our trap. To complete the cordon round the net, the Malay Guides in Province Wellesley and the other Malay States must be apprised of the approaching coup. I am going to entrust this message to you, and I think you will enjoy that better than meeting De Souza at the hotel after last night's discoveries. What do you say?"

"Rather! I'm ready. De Souza nearly wormed a lot out of me the last time we met,

and I'd have great difficulty in facing him in a friendly way after learning his treachery."

"Just so, and for that very reason I welcome this invitation from Captain Nicholson. He is the officer to whom you must deliver my message, under the ostensible purpose of sport. I shall write him a note now, explaining what is wanted of him; and if you throw a few necessaries into your kit bag you will be ready to start shortly after tiffin."

"Right you are," responded Percy, jumping up; and then, pausing as the thought struck him, he added, "Oh, I promised to play tennis with these girls at the hotel this evening."

"Run over at the last minute and promise them a sladang's horns instead," said Mr. Alden, smiling. "It is just as well you should announce your departure openly so long as you keep out of De Souza's way."

"I'll manage that," was the confident reply; "but as to the sladang's horns, they must go home to——"

"Quite right; never forget old friends. And now be off while I explain the whole matter on paper to Captain Nicholson."

A couple of hours later father and son met again at tiffin, when Percy announced that he

had been over at the hotel bidding adieu to his friends.

"As I was leaving, De Souza came up, asked if it was true that you and I were leaving the bungalow. I told him that I was going off to shoot sladang this afternoon, but that you were staying on, as you were not feeling fit yet. 'Oh, just you and your boy,' he said. I told him no, just myself alone, as Swee Hin had run off last night after what we supposed was an attempt to rob you. Then I cleared out. Was I wrong in saying that about Swee Hin ?"

"No, I think not. Swee Hin, if he has not already done so, will certainly report what has occurred, and it is just as well that you made no attempt to hide the matter. De Souza may guess the truth, but will probably imagine we are still in ignorance about the cipher message."

"May I call in and see Cecil and tell him anything ?"

"Yes, that is what I meant to suggest. It is wiser for you not to go direct to Colonel Fell, but get Brinscombe to inform him what has occurred and the reason of your trip to the States. If Cecil is out, write a note and leave it with Abdul."

"Very well, dad ; is that all ?"

"Just one more point. If you can manage it, take Atjeh with you."

"Atjeh ! but he is one of their spies."

"Yes, I know, and that is the very reason I want him under supervision. Get him to go quietly without telling him where you are going. If there is difficulty, use your own discretion ; but if you take him, watch him closely."

"I'll do what I can. When should I start ?"

"The sooner the better. An oppas has taken down your bag, and is to take it to the Residency in a kreta sewa, and wait for you there. Here is the letter for Captain Nicholson. It explains matters very fully. You can either stay with him and help to prevent the ' Flying Dutchman ' escaping on that side, or come back to Penang."

"When is it going to come off, do you think ?" asked Percy eagerly.

"I don't know for certain—within the next few days, without a doubt ; but we hope that Colonel Fell's police will give us due warning. Now, my dear lad, good-bye. Take care of yourself, and if you do get within range of a sladang, keep your head and shoot straight. I have every confidence in Captain Nicholson."

With a final hand-clasp father and son parted, and in a few minutes Percy was out of sight, swinging down the tortuous path zigzagging down the Hill. Arrived at the foot, he picked up a kreta sewa, and drove straight to the Residency. Here he overtook the oppas with his kit bag, and sent the man to the stables to summon Atjeh. The syce appeared immediately, and was ordered to get into the first kreta and take charge of the bag. After a momentary hesitation he obeyed, and the little cavalcade set out for Brinscombe's house. Much to Percy's disappointment, his chum was out, and he had to resort to a written communication. Sealing the letter, he sent for Abdul, and gave him the note, with strict injunctions to deliver it himself to Brinscombe as soon as possible. Then, dismissing the kretas, he told Atjeh to lift the bag and accompany him. A walk of five minutes brought them to the pier, where the launch, which made the trip every half-hour, was waiting. Atjeh had begun to show signs of uneasiness, and when Percy ordered him to board the launch it almost seemed as if he would refuse.

"Go on board," repeated Percy, "quick!"

Glancing swiftly round, Atjeh's gaze lighted on a sampan full of Malays that had put in under the stern of the launch. His hesitation vanished, and he stepped on board, followed by his master.

The signal had been given to "cast off," and the screw had begun to revolve, when a momentary hitch occurred. Shouts were raised to "stop the engines," native voices swelled the clamour and increased the hubbub. The engineer in charge promptly cut off steam, while his comrades investigated the cause of the commotion. By means of sundry threats and blows, they speedily succeeded in quelling the tumult, and then it appeared that the sampan had somehow become entangled with the hawser of the launch. Percy glanced aft, and was surprised to see Atjeh leaning over the stern in animated conversation with one of the Malays. The delay was trivial, and the launch was speedily under way; but as it cleared the sampan the lad noticed with a start of surprise that the syce carefully concealed something which had been hurriedly thrust into his hand.

## CHAPTER XII.

### A SLADANG HUNT AND ITS RESULT.

THE little launch cleaved its way fussily through the still, sheltered waters of the harbour, and speedily approached the mainland. Percy's thoughts were busy with the significant incident he had just witnessed. His first impulse had been to stop the launch and have Atjeh arrested without a moment's delay ; but further reflection had convinced him that this was impracticable. Even if an incriminating letter were found on the syce, the news of the discovery would reach the ringleaders and upset his father's arrangements. Clearly the best plan was to feign ignorance, keep the Achinese under a watchful eye, and consult his host on his arrival. By the time he had come to this conclusion the launch was alongside the jetty, and already making fast.

Percy stepped ashore, and Atjeh followed

with the bag. A European dog-cart was standing close by, attended by a syce and a native in the uniform of the Malay States Guides. The latter came forward, and, saluting, inquired if he were Tuan Alden, and indicating the dog-cart, announced that it was sent by Captain Nicholson.

"Very good," said Percy ; then, turning, he gave an order to Atjeh.

"Get into the trap."

A look of amazement and anger swept over the syce's face at the words, and like a flash Percy realized that the fellow had fully expected to be sent back in the launch. For a moment the two faced each other, both fully aware of the issues that hung in the balance ; then, recognizing that he had been outmanœuvred, the Achinese gave in sullenly, and, picking up the bag, jumped into the back seat. Percy got in, the Guide swung himself up beside Atjeh, and with a bound the big Australian waler started off. The road was good, and they bowled along at a brisk pace between fields of padi and sugar cane, with an occasional cocoa-nut plantation. After an hour's driving they entered a native village, and drew up under the shade of a large tree, where stood another

syce lazily whisking the flies from a spare horse.

"We change horses here, Tuan," remarked the driver, dismounting. "Another hour, and we reach Captain Nicholson's house."

The change was quickly effected, and again they were off, heading for the hills. Once they passed through an estate covered with short, slender saplings, set at regular distances apart, and to Percy's query the driver replied that this was a rubber plantation. The lad gazed with interest on the scene, especially when they came upon a gang of coolies busily engaged in cutting down and clearing a large area for further planting. The road then led upwards through a wooded country, across a river to a level piece of ground, and here, after a sudden bend, they obtained their first view of the house. A large, straggling bungalow, it was situated so as to command a fine view of the river, while some distance behind it were the men's quarters. As they swept in under the porch, a tall figure in white came out to greet their arrival.

"Welcome to Batu Kawan," he exclaimed, shaking hands with Percy, who had jumped down. "I am Captain Nicholson, as no doubt

you've guessed. Your father was unable to come? Detained by business as usual!"

"Yes, and also by a slight attack of fever. He is up the Hill taking a rest."

"Tut, tut! Sorry to hear that, but very glad you've been able to come over. Come in and have a cup of tea. Ramsammy will look after your bag, and fix your man."

For a moment Percy hesitated; but a look at his host's strong face reassured him.

"If you don't mind," he said, in a low tone, "I wish you would give your men a quiet hint to keep an eye on the fellow. I'll explain when we're alone."

Beyond a quick glance Captain Nicholson betrayed no feeling of surprise at this strange request.

"Oh, all right," he replied loudly. "I understand." And then to Ramsammy, in Malay, he added, "Tuan Alden will need nothing at present; you can take his man to the kitchen."

The Tamil butler thereupon retired with Atjeh, and the captain, turning to the Malay Guide who remained, gave him some rapid directions.

"There! Now for our tea."

He led the way to a veranda at the end of the bungalow, where a magnificent view of the hills was obtained. Here a couple of long chairs were set out, with the tea-table ready laid between, and, motioning Percy to a seat, Captain Nicholson passed him a cup.

"Sugar? I thought so, and milk. No cream hereabouts, worse luck! Try one of these cakes, they're not bad. Now we're settled, I should like very much to hear the explanation about your man. By-the-bye, what's his bangsa? I mean, where does he come from?"

"He calls himself Atjeh, and we believe he is an Achinese."

Captain Nicholson whistled.

"An Achinese! That accounts for his wild looks. They're a troublesome lot; but what are you doing with one as your boy?"

"He's my syce, really. My boy ran away last night."

The captain burst out laughing.

"Upon my word, you're a treat, Alden. I understand you've only been in the East a few weeks, and yet in that time your boy has hooked it, and you calmly elect an Achinese as understudy! I can well believe there is some interesting tale at the back of it all."

" You are quite right, there is," rejoined Percy, smiling, " and you will grasp it better if you read this letter which my father sent for you. I can fill in the details afterwards."

He handed over the note, and, while his host was engaged in reading it, helped himself to another cup of tea, and tucked into the cakes and other eatables. Once or twice he glanced at Captain Nicholson, and could see by the expression of his face that the Resident's news interested him deeply. At length he folded up the letter thoughtfully, and drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

" This is great news," he said, tapping his pocket. " The main points are quite clear, and it is evident that I can take no action to-night, or, indeed, until Mr. Alden gives the word. Now, if you are not tired, I had planned that we should go and have a shot at the pigeon. What do you say? It is a couple of hours till dark."

Percy assented with alacrity, and then remembering Atjeh and the incident of the launch, he confided his suspicions to his companion. Captain Nicholson listened thoughtfully, pulling his moustache and nodding at intervals.

"The rascal is safe enough with my men," he observed at last. "They have orders to treat him well, but watch him carefully. I am averse to having him searched, as it would give us away completely, and probably end in a fiasco, as these natives have a positive genius for concealing things about their person. Tomorrow afternoon, if we do not hear from your father, we might risk it; but for the present—come along and have a shot."

Armed with an up-to-date hammerless ejector twelve-bore, Percy was soon trudging along with his host, followed by Snap and Spot, the two fox terriers. They took the path along the river bank, and so absorbed were they in discussing Percy's dealings with De Souza and the "Flying Dutchman" that several times they failed to notice a flock of pigeon until too late.

"This won't do at all," exclaimed the captain, gazing after a bird which had passed them at close range. "I brought you out here to shoot, not to answer questions. Mum's the word! You take the left near the jungle, and —m-a-r-k!"

Something flashed out of the trees at a great pace. Percy, instinctively flinging up his gun,

pulled the trigger, and a cloud of feathers answered the report.

"Good shot! You've got him," cried his companion. "Fetch it, Spot!"

With varying fortune their sport continued, until six brace of beautiful birds had fallen to their guns, and Captain Nicholson reluctantly declared that it was time to turn. Darkness descended while they were yet a considerable distance from the bungalow, but the bright gleam of the lamps guided their steps, and at the captain's hail a couple of Guides hastened to relieve them of guns and game-bag. After a refreshing bath and change, Percy did ample justice to the dinner which followed, and succeeded in drawing from his host many interesting reminiscences of his life in the East. While they were drinking their coffee a message was brought that Atjeh craved permission to see his master, and it was agreed that he should be interviewed at once.

On being ushered in, the Achinese gave but a perfunctory "taby," the customary salute to white men, and his tone was almost insolent.

"I want to go back to Penang," he began.

Percy knew well enough that this was a tone the man would not have dared to adopt towards

the Resident, and he determined at once to check it. After staring at the syce, therefore, for an instant, he deliberately turned to his host, and asked the history of a fine pair of horns hanging on the wall. Appreciating the situation, the captain entered on a detailed account of this particular hunt, Atjeh being compelled to wait until he had finished. At length, in a much humbler voice, he ventured again to draw attention toward himself.

“ Tuan ! ”

Percy turned, and appeared to notice him for the first time.

“ Ah, Atjeh; you want to speak to me ? ”

“ Yes, Tuan. May I go back to Penang ? ”

“ What, to-night ? ”

“ Yes, to-night, if the Tuan permits.” And then, as though recognizing that some excuse was necessary, he added, “ I have no ‘ barang.’ ”

“ Tuan Nicholson will see that his men provide you with anything you need for the night. You can’t go back to Penang now. It is too late.”

Atjeh still lingered, obviously wishing to press his request, but uncertain how to proceed, when Captain Nicholson intervened.

“ Tuan Alden may possibly return to-morrow

evening," he said, " and one night can't make much difference to you. We are going to look for sladang to-morrow, and you would come with us."

" Sladang ! " Atjeh's fierce face lit up at the word, and without further demur he departed, accompanied by the watchful Ramsammy.

" I think he will give no further trouble to-night," commented the captain when he had gone. " The Achinese are noted hunters, and the bagging of a sladang would be an achievement worth boasting about to his friends. All the same, I agree with you that there is some motive for his request. His anxiety to get back to Penang is not natural, and looks bad."

" Should we not have it out with him to-night ? "

" I don't see very well how we can," replied Captain Nicholson, rising. " If he really has any written matter he will destroy it at the first suspicious movement on our part ; and, after all, your father appears quite confident of obtaining any necessary information through the police. Now, suppose we adjourn to the veranda for a smoke before ' lights out ' ? "

Under the influence of the soothing weed and the magic of the beautiful tropical night

the captain grew quite communicative, and Percy listened with rapt attention to many a tale of adventure in all quarters of the globe. It was getting on for midnight when he reluctantly followed his host's advice to turn in ; and even then, listening to the strange sounds issuing from the jungle close at hand, it was some time before he could compose himself for sleep.

Early next morning they were astir, and after a hearty breakfast his host led the way to the gun-room, and carefully explained the mechanism of the rifle with which he was to be armed.

" Aim well forward behind the foreleg," were the final words of advice, " and don't get flurried. Manœuvre so as to get a side shot ; but if you are charged, keep cool and aim at the neck. These soft-nosed bullets will rake an elephant from stem to stern, but may very likely glance off the dense mass of horn on a sladang's forehead. Now, if you are ready, I think we should start. We have to drive five miles before we get to the ground, and the dog-cart was ordered for seven o'clock. Ah, here it comes."

The rifles having been carefully handed in, Captain Nicholson took the reins, Percy mounted

beside him, while Atjeh and another syce occupied the back seats.

"No fear of your man running away just at present," chuckled the captain when they had started. "One can read the lust of the chase in his very look, not to speak of the appearance of that murderous spear he is nursing so carefully. Ye gods! a spear to hunt sladang! He comes of a fighting race every inch of him. If only these fellows were under our rule, what a splendid regiment one could raise!"

The road, which led through thick jungle lands, grew steadily worse, until at length, as they left the trees behind and entered on a stretch of coarse grass, or "lalang," it seemed to Percy to disappear altogether.

"Rough work, eh?" remarked the captain, recovering from a jolt which had nearly jerked the reins out of his hands. "Hold on tight and we shan't be long now. Yonder is the shed where we leave the trap."

It was with an unfeigned sigh of relief that Percy descended and stretched his cramped and aching limbs while the syce unyoked the steaming horse and proceeded to walk it gently up and down.

"Now, then, are you ready?" asked Captain Nicholson, slinging his stalking-glass over his shoulder and handing Percy his rifle and a handful of cartridges. "We must keep together for a bit until we clear this high grass, and then we can form a plan of campaign. By the right. Quick march!"

They set off at a steady pace, Atjeh, grasping his spear, bringing up the rear. It proved difficult walking through the lalang, which grew to a height of six feet; but after an hour's struggle they emerged on to the edge of what, Captain Nicholson announced, was, in the wet season, a swamp. The grass was now shorter, and here it was that the sladang disported themselves. Moving cautiously forward to a small eminence, the three hunters lay down, while the captain, unslinging his glass, made a careful survey of the surrounding country. Slowly the telescope moved from left to right, and the two watchers followed its course with intense interest. Straight ahead something appeared to come in the line of vision, judging by the time the glass remained stationary in that direction. Twice it was lowered and raised again, and then, having completed his survey, Captain Nicholson turned to his companions.

"We're in luck," he whispered exultingly. "Right in front, about a mile off, there is a sladang—a fine fellow with a good head. Take a look. Over by that tall tree—more to the left; that's about it. Now pick up a dark patch rising out of the grass—the beast is lying down—and watch carefully for a movement."

Percy endeavoured to follow the directions, but could make nothing of it. There certainly was a dark patch showing above the grass, but—why, yes, it was a sladang after all! He gave a gasp as the great animal rose slowly and, turning round, seemed to gaze fiercely right into his face. What a mighty beast!

"It's looking at us," he whispered somewhat nervously, laying down the glass. "I'm sure it saw us."

"Not at all likely," was the reply, "so long as we lie quiet."

Picking up the glass, the captain levelled it again at the distant monster.

"There he goes rolling in the mud. What a splashing! He's settled again. Now's our chance."

He returned the glass to its leather case, and Atjeh, who had been intently watching the

proceedings, gave a grunt of satisfaction and understanding.

"Sladang ada?"

"Yes, Atjeh, a great big fellow, and we're going for him now."

Then, turning to Percy, the captain continued in English,—

"My plan is this. I'll crawl a hundred yards or so to the right, and then keep fifty yards ahead of you and Atjeh. In this way, if the sladang charges, one of us is certain of a side shot. You and your Achinese can go straight at him. The ground is very uneven, and you will have little difficulty in finding cover. When closing in be on the alert, because, though there is no wind, puffs of air rise suddenly from any quarter and may betray our presence."

Having carefully overhauled both rifles again, the captain tightened his belt and prepared to make a start.

"Good luck," he whispered, shaking Percy's hand. "Wait till you hear the call of the night-jar repeated three times—then be off. Atjeh may be mixed up in the gun-running business, but he'll back you up at this game. But a spear, a spear for sladang!"

With a last grim chuckle at the absurd idea he glided away and was speedily lost to view. His departure brought home vividly to Percy the strangeness of the situation. Here he was, a lad fresh from school, about to stalk one of the fiercest and most vindictive of wild beasts, while for a companion he had a member of a notoriously treacherous race, himself strongly suspected of plotting against the authorities. Was it possible that the fellow harboured murderous designs? In spite of the captain's reassuring words, he glanced apprehensively at the spear; and noting his look, Atjeh grinned with conscious pride.

"Very strong spear. Atjeh great hunter," he remarked, and was about to execute some fancy thrusts with his weapon when he paused, in the attitude of listening, and glanced inquisitorily at his master.

"Jug-jug," came the plaintive cry of the night-jar; "jug-jug," and yet again "jug-jug."

The moment for action had come, and all thoughts but those of the chase vanished on the instant. Almost before he was conscious of his action the lad found himself over the hillock and crawling down the exposed side.

Presently he reached a hollow with a rising piece of ground sheltering him from the dark patch in the distance for which he was aiming. A cautious advance, and then a long, tiring wriggle through thick grass and over moist ground. Another ticklish descent, and then a respite, as most of the opposite slope could be taken on foot. The dark patch was much nearer now—had, in fact, resolved itself into a huge brown animal lying on the ground, with immense horns swinging from side to side as the irritated owner sought relief from the swarms of tormenting insects. Fully half the distance had been covered, and the quarry had shown no signs of alarm.

Percy halted to wipe the streaming perspiration from his brow, and Atjeh, who all along had kept close at his elbow, pressed on and took the lead impetuously. For a moment the English lad was inclined to order him back, but the man's evident enthusiasm appealed to his sense of sportsmanship, and he smiled involuntarily as he watched the lithe, brown figure sink to earth as the summit was reached, wriggle a yard or two, and then disappear. Grasping his rifle, Percy prepared to follow, but had barely covered three yards

when he paused. Was that a shout of warning? There it came again, loud and insistent from the right, and now mingling with it rose an answering yell from the Achinese. What had happened? For an instant the lad's courage, shaken by the vague alarms, wavered, and he gazed around wildly and unreasoningly. The crack of Captain Nicholson's rifle, followed by the "zip" of the bullet through the air, steadied his nerves and stirred his mind to action. Flinging open the breech of his rifle, he had just pushed home a cartridge and shot the bolt, when Atjeh appeared on the ridge in front, evidently in full retreat.

As he reached the summit he turned, hurled his spear at an invisible pursuer, and then renewed his flight with staring eyes and panting breath. Bewildered, the lad stood with rifle thrust forward, ready for action, and next instant the meaning of the disturbance was made plain. Over the ridge, like a whirlwind, burst a huge sladang, snorting defiance and breathing death and destruction. Atjeh's spear stuck quivering in its neck, the last despairing action of a doomed man. Instinctively the rifle flew to the boy's shoulder.

Not a moment was to be lost. Already the great beast was within striking distance of the syce, when the Englishman pulled the trigger.

Bang !

The sladang staggered in its flight, recovered, and with a vicious squeal impaled the wretched Atjeh on its sweeping horns and flung him, screaming, high into the air. Aghast at the terrible spectacle, but nerved to desperation at his perilous plight, Percy tore out the empty shell, jammed in another cartridge, and dropped on one knee, determined to die fighting. Vindictive by nature, the sladang wheeled to gore its prostrate victim, and in doing so offered a broadside target to the waiting rifle. Steadying himself, as the captain's words, "Keep cool," flashed across his mind, Percy dwelt an instant on his aim and softly pressed the trigger. Uttering a last bellow of defiance, the sladang leapt convulsively forward, and with a mighty crash fell headlong to the earth. Sick and faint, Percy staggered to his feet, the ground spinning dizzily round him. As in a mist he saw Captain Nicholson, with set, white face, charge over the ridge and come hurrying down the slope. He paused a moment to stoop over

the figure lying quiet beside the sladang, and then strode forward to the trembling lad.

"Thank God!" he exclaimed fervently, "that you escaped."

"Atjeh?"

"Stone dead. He must have been killed instantaneously."

Percy shivered, and the captain pressed his arm sympathetically. For a space emotion mastered the lad and held him speechless. Death had passed very close, and the suddenness of his fell onslaught had struck chill terror; but youth is buoyant, and in the presence of the officer's calmness the lad gradually regained control of himself.

"How did it happen?" he asked presently.

"My impression is that Atjeh must have blundered right on another sladang which had been lying concealed amongst some bushes at the foot of the slope. I was resting for a moment, and, watching for your appearance, was amazed to see Atjeh suddenly come into sight fleeing, with a second sladang in hot pursuit. Owing to the angle at which I stood there was only time for a snap shot before man and beast disappeared over the ridge. I heard your shot, followed by a shriek, and my heart

stood still with horror. The second report from your rifle gave me a glimmer of hope; but you may imagine my relief when I found you safe and sound."

"The other sladang?"

"Luckily it bolted in the opposite direction, or there might have been a different tale to tell. Once roused, nothing but death to themselves or their pursuers gives them pause."

"What are we to do with—with Atjeh?"

"Bury him—that is to say, send men to bury him. We have not got the implements. I'll have the sladang's horns kept for you too. Before we go I should like to see whether one shot only got home. Do you feel like coming with me?"

Percy nodded. His confidence had returned, along with a natural curiosity to examine his quarry. Together they approached the fallen monster, and gazed in wonder at its mighty proportions. Captain Nicholson remarked that it was one of the largest he had ever seen, and must have stood over five feet six inches at the shoulder, while the span of the horns was even greater. The fatal shot had penetrated the heart, and on the thick frontal bone of the head, between the horns,

was the mark of another bullet which had glanced off.

"Another inch higher and Atjeh would have been saved," sighed Percy remorsefully, when it was pointed out to him.

"You must not blame yourself for that," replied his companion, laying a hand on his shoulder. "There was no time for a steady aim, and the most experienced hunter could not have been trusted to do better. Indeed, in such a crisis, few would have done so well, and I am proud of you, Alden, very proud."

The lad thrilled at the words, but his eyes sought the body lying huddled together thirty feet away. The captain noted the glance.

"Wait here till I cover that poor fellow, and place some sticks to ward off the vultures."

"I will come with you," said Percy quietly.

"Is it wise?"

"I must. Don't you remember we wondered how we could search him, and now——"

"By Jove! I had forgotten. You are a plucky youngster, but you are right. Come."

The syce lay on his back, staring with sightless eyes at the pitiless blue sky, and save for the gaping rent in his side whence his life had flown, he might have been resting peacefully.

His single garment, the native sarong, had been loosened, and covered him like a shroud, but there was no sign of a paper.

"His belt. See, there it is over there," said Percy, picking it up. "Only a pipe, some tobacco, and a coin or two. The pipe is broken."

"Stay!" cried Captain Nicholson, snatching the pipe as the lad was about to throw it away. "Let me look at it."

The stem had been snapped off short, but something protruded from the piece still attached to the bowl. Extracting this carefully, he produced a dirty piece of paper, and, smoothing it out, examined it intently.

"Look at this," he said quietly. "I believe we have found what we wanted."

He pointed to the words on the paper, smeared but legible.

"Thursday night—half two—castle."

"What on earth does it mean?"

"I'll explain as we go along, for we must be off at once. Help me to arrange a few sticks round the poor fellow. We shall find some over there."

In a short time their task was completed, and raising their topees in mute farewell they

picked up the rifles and started on the return journey.

"Now," said the captain, when they were well under way, "I'll tell you the message I read in the scrap of paper hidden in Atjeh's pipe. First and foremost: It was written by a Dutchman."

"How do you know that? The words are English."

"Yes, that is so; but no Englishman speaks of 'half two'—he says one-thirty or half-past one."

"Oh, is that the meaning? I did not understand. Then is 'castle' a cipher word?"

"I think not. But let me explain. The message is written by a Dutchman, and conveyed to Atjeh in a secretive manner. Knowing what we do, have you any doubt as to the author of the message?"

"No."

"Very well, then. On receiving this message Atjeh shows evident dismay at the prospect of leaving Penang, and pleads hard for permission to return. Plainly he has been informed that the message is urgent, and, left to himself, last night he would probably have decamped. Being watched by my men, he

made a virtue of necessity, but took the precaution of hiding the incriminating note."

"But what about the 'castle'?"

"I am coming to that. It means exactly what it says. Now the only castle north of Singapore is the old ruined fort on the sea front of Penang, and here at 1.30 to-morrow night the 'Flying Dutchman' proposes to meet some one, probably De Souza, and make the final arrangements with regard to the rifles ordered for the Achinese."

Percy drew a deep breath.

"Of course that's the meaning. It is quite plain when you point it out," he exclaimed. "But this means that they will catch my father napping. No! De Souza can't know anything yet, seeing that we have intercepted the message."

"Don't be too sure of that. These Malay boatmen would watch for Atjeh's return, and, finding that he was detained, would report accordingly to the 'Flying Dutchman.'"

"That means that I must get back and inform my father at once."

"Exactly. You must go straight back, while I make the best arrangements possible for following out the Resident's plans."

Captain Nicholson then proceeded to sketch out the details of his proposed dispositions, and the two were still discussing these when they arrived at the spot where the dog-cart had been left. The syce was informed of what had occurred, and, having harnessed the horse, was sent off immediately to guard Atjeh's remains, the Englishmen setting out at once for the bungalow. Here a burial party was hurriedly collected and dispatched to the scene of the fatality, whilst the captain insisted on Percy partaking of some food. The lad was anxious to continue his journey to Penang immediately, and, still suffering from shock, felt little inclination to eat, but, yielding reluctantly to his host's advice, found himself greatly the better both in mind and body.

" You're looking more like yourself again," remarked Captain Nicholson, escorting him to the door as the trap drove up, " and you mustn't dwell too much on the tragedy of your first sladang hunt. Remember how important your news will be to the Resident. Now you had better be going. It is past three already, and there may be some delay in getting a kreta sewa at Kuala."

With a parting shake of the hand, Percy

clambered into his seat, and next moment they were off. The horse was fresh, and, obeying orders, the syce kept up a good speed and reached Kuala, the little village where a hired conveyance was to be procured, in very good time. Here, however, a serious delay occurred, and before the road was taken again it was getting on for five o'clock. Cooped up in the stuffy little kreta, left to his own reflections, a reaction set in, and Percy became unreasonably depressed and nervous. Again he seemed to see the sinister form of the mighty sladang charging down upon him, and in imagination he recalled the terrible scene, and Atjeh's scream rang in his ears. The thought that a short twenty-four hours previously he had traversed this road with the Achinese by his side upset him, and an intangible feeling of danger and dread weighed upon his senses.

The sun sank low, and still there were several miles to cover. He longed to be with his father again, and a sudden unaccountable foreboding seized him that they were destined never to meet. He urged the syce to greater efforts, but the wretched little Battak pony was tired, and unable to keep up a trot. The sun vanished, and instantly a cold chill fell

on the air, making the lad shiver, whilst a gray shadow blurred the atmosphere, as though a huge curtain were being drawn over the sky. Then suddenly it was dark, and, looking ahead, he perceived the welcome lights of Penang twinkling across the Straits.

Ten minutes later the kreta pulled up just as the launch vanished in the gloom. Picking up his bag, Percy paid off the syce, and made his way along the jetty, intending to await the return of the launch. Several sampans were lying alongside, and on his appearance, after some subdued murmurs, a native rose in one of these, and offered to row him across. The lad hesitated, calculating the speediest way of reaching the island.

"Tuan," said the Malay, as if reading his thoughts, "Tuan, this very quick sampan. Four boatmen. Quicker than wait for fire-boat."

"All right, I'll come," replied the lad in sudden resolve, stepping into the frail craft.

The men pushed off quietly, and the sampan glided silently out into the darkness.

Slight though the motion was, it served to upset Percy's balance. He staggered, and clutched at the nearest native to steady himself.

The man, evading his grasp, gave a sudden thrust which completed his discomfiture. Tottering backwards, he tripped over one of the seats, and fell sprawling at full length. In an instant three pairs of arms seized him, a stout gag was thrust into his mouth, a sack was flung dexterously over his head, and, pinioned hand and foot, he found himself a prisoner at the bottom of the boat.

## CHAPTER XIII.

### A CAPTIVE.

TAKEN wholly unawares by the suddenness and unexpectedness of the assault, Percy's first bewildered feeling was merely one of anger against the four natives for their extraordinary behaviour. Robbery, no doubt, was the motive, and he expected every second the indignity of a search ; but as the minutes passed and he lay unmolested, doubts as to his personal safety crept into his mind. Whither was this ill-omened sampan destined ? Who and what were her owners ? By the swirl of water against the sides Percy guessed that the boat was moving rapidly.

Presently the sound of the oars ceased, and a voice hailed them in Malay. One of the boatmen answered in the same tongue, and a little later they bumped sharply against what appeared to be the side of a ship.

Some delay ensued, there were whisperings close at hand, and then the lad felt himself seized and tossed unceremoniously into the air and on to a deck. Again he was lifted and carried a few paces. A door was thrust open, and he was dumped down helplessly once more.

Percy realized, from the heavy odour of burning oil and stale tobacco, that this must be a saloon, and the clinking of glasses warned him that the place was occupied.

"I drink to this pleasant meeting," chuckled a guttural voice close by, "and I think Mr. Alden would like to see his friends."

"All right; I don't mind. We must remove the gag anyway to make him speak."

If the first voice seemed strangely familiar, Percy had no doubt as to the identity of the second speaker. He was prepared, therefore, on the sack being removed from his head, to discover his quondam school companion, De Souza, leaning over him. The half-caste grinned maliciously.

"You're trapped, Alden, and you must know it," he said coolly.

"Give your word not to shout or attempt an escape, and your bonds will be removed."

Half suffocated with the clumsy gag, stiff and sore from the chafing cords, Percy nodded his assent to this proposal. The gag was accordingly removed, his hands and feet were untied, and staggering to a seat with a deep sigh of relief, his gaze fell for the first time on the evil countenance of De Souza's companion—the “ Flying Dutchman ”! Fate had indeed played him a cruel trick in delivering him into the hands of his worst enemies.

“ How ! Are you not glad again to meet your old friend ? ” inquired the Dutchman, noting his look, “ or perhaps it is that without the glasses you do not recognize me, hey ? ”

“ He knows who you are right enough,” cut in De Souza significantly, “ and the sooner we get to business the better. This boat may be searched again, and it is not safe for me to be here too long. Now, Alden, you know what we are after. What have you done with Atjeh, and where is the note ? ”

“ Searched again ! ” This boat, then, must be the *Lankat*. Percy’s mind worked rapidly, and, to gain a moment for reflection, he simulated excessive stiffness of the jaw. Was it possible to feign ignorance with regard to the message ? A glance at the Dutchman’s face

showed him plainly that this was no time for bluffing.

"I have not got the note," he answered quietly, "and Atjeh is dead."

"Dead!" repeated Richellmann, the veins on his forehead swelling with a sudden gust of passion. "By heavens, if you haf killed him—"

"Tush! What does a native's death matter?" interrupted De Souza callously. "What became of the note?"

"See you, half-caste, it matters this," hissed the Dutchman furiously. "Atjeh was a faithful servant to me, and the 'Flying Dutchman' never forgives an injury. If this boy had a hand in Atjeh's death—he dies!"

He dashed his great fist on the table as he concluded, making the glasses ring, and turned the full fury of his baleful green eyes on his helpless captive. In spite of himself, Percy quailed under the menacing scrutiny, and it required all his courage to return the gaze unflinchingly.

"No one had a hand in Atjeh's death. He was killed by a sladang." And very briefly he described the fatal hunt.

De Souza, unconvinced, scoffed openly; but

his companion listened attentively, nodding ponderously at the conclusion.

"So!" he commented, pouring out a glass of brandy and drinking it off. "So! That is good—for you. Your tale is true, and you do not yet die. As for us—we know now all that we want."

"Know all! Why, we have learnt nothing about your note," exclaimed De Souza excitedly.

The Dutchman chuckled, a quiet, silent, oily laugh that jarred upon the senses.

"The note always—you talk of the note, but it is the money you mean," he snarled. "So! If the rifles correctly arrive, and you meet me to-morrow night, the money will be yours."

"Meet you to-morrow night! You are mad! We are betrayed, and will be arrested."

The "Flying Dutchman" shook his head.

"Ach, no. I will tell you why. The captain—what you call him—Nicholson—he has the note."

"How—how do you know that?"

"I will explain. Atjeh gets my message in the launch, but is carried away from Penang by mine friend Alden. It may be that this young man has seen the message given, and

suspects something—it may be that he tells his friend the captain ; but nothing is done, for next day they hunt the sladang.”

“ But that proves nothing,” objected De Souza.

“ It proves plainly to me that Atjeh still keeps the note. Otherwise would he—would any one—have gone to the hunt ? ”

The half-caste nodded sullenly, acknowledging the point.

“ Then Atjeh is killed,” continued the Dutchman more slowly, “ tossed by the fierce bull, and when he is lying dead the note is discovered. Is it not so ? ”

He turned suddenly on Percy with the question, and read his answer in the lad’s discomfiture.

“ Ach, yes, I am right. If not, why should Mr. Alden be in so great a hurry that he cannot wait for the launch ? ”

“ Then—then the Resident does not know, but Captain Nicholson thinks he does know ? ”

The Dutchman nodded, noting his companion’s rising excitement with a placid amusement.

“ We can guard ourselves against Captain Nicholson,” he exclaimed ; “ but Percy

must—" He leant over and whispered in Richellmann's ear.

Percy shivered. From the first glance round the stuffy cabin at his captors he had recognized that he was in a tight corner ; but only as he listened to the " Flying Dutchman " had he realized just how tight the corner really was. Only now, alas ! too late, did he understand the half-caste's bitter vindictiveness, and the knowledge sent a cold chill of fear to his heart.

" It must be done." De Souza's words fell on his ear. " It must be as I say, unless—unless you forgo this meeting, and consent to pay me now before we sail."

" Before I haf the rifles ? Not so. We meet to-morrow night," exclaimed the Dutchman emphatically. " But our young friend may yet be useful. I have a better plan."

" The risk is too great. My way is sure."

" He must—leave Penang. Certainly. He will sail with me, and go as my present to the Achinese in place of Atjeh. Then, if unpleasantness occur, I say to the Resident, ' You haf me, but the Achinese haf your son. Release me, and they will release him. Refuse '—but the Resident will not refuse ; he knows the Achinese.' "

" What about us ? "

" You—you will haf your money. Now I go to tell them to sail. It is time to part."

So saying, he rose, and without so much as a look at the others, left the saloon.

For a space there was silence. The half-caste, baffled and insulted, gazed after the overbearing Dutchman, whilst Percy, tired and oppressed, sat motionless, a prey to the vague fears awakened by the Dutchman's parting words. Yes, he was in a hole—a bad hole. Each of his friends would imagine he was safely with the other ; while, unless Captain Nicholson got through another message to the Resident, the gun-runners would complete their arrangements and escape. Even if they should be captured, the lad realized his father's terrible position, forced by the " Flying Dutchman's " cunning to release his prisoners or abandon his son to cruel savages. The significant words, " The Resident will not refuse ; *he knows the Achinese,*" filled Percy with a lively horror. He recalled Brinscombe's tales of the dreadful torture inflicted by these savages on white men whom they captured. He remembered one awful story of a Dutchman suddenly surprised and taken prisoner whilst sleep-

ing in his house, and how his native servants, lying hid in the jungle, heard his agonized cries for help, and crept back at daybreak to find a body unrecognizable as a human being. Surely De Souza, the boy who had lived and played with him for years at Felton College in England, was not so utterly heartless as to abandon him to such a ghastly fate. Surely—but the precious minutes were slipping past. Already he heard the command to raise the anchor. He must act, and act promptly.

"De Souza," he began nervously, his voice shaking in spite of his determination to keep a grip of himself. "Susie, you won't let that fellow hand me over to the Achinese, will you? You know what fiends they are. Help me out of this horrible business!"

He leant forward, stretching out his hands appealingly; but his companion gave no sign.

"They are raising the anchor," continued Percy more quickly. "Now is the only chance. Help me! My father will protect you. I swear——"

"Help you? What can I do? It is all your own fault. Why did you steal my letter and meddle with our affairs? All along you have been in our way, and now that we have

you safe you coolly ask me to let you go free. Free ! to betray us ! It is your safety against ours, and you have given us no choice."

" But, Susie——"

" Look here, Alden, it is no use. I can't help you, and if I could I wouldn't. There ! I swore to get even with you ever since that football match with the Academy, and now we're quits. Go and whine to the Dutchman. You're his goods, not mine. You and your friends despised and insulted me, and now—a merry voyage to Achin."

With a mocking laugh and scornful wave of the hand he turned on his heel and hurried on deck, calling for his sampan. A minute later the sound of oars announced his departure, and, left alone to his bitter reflections, poor Percy abandoned himself to despair.

Overhead the noise increased as, slowly and with much stamping of feet, the anchor was hauled on deck. A whistle suddenly shrilled, and the creaking and trampling ceased. A soft breeze stole in at the port-hole, cleansing the stuffy saloon, and wafting the far-away strains of a waltz from the band playing on the esplanade. The captive lad lifted his head from his arms and listened eagerly. The swelling breeze

bore the sound more distinctly, and then gently, inexorably, it died away. With feverish eyes Percy gazed out into the black night. He could imagine so well the scene, the gay life he was leaving behind, perhaps for ever. The cricketers, practice just finished, would be in the pavilion enjoying a rest and an iced drink after their exertions. The long line of carriages and rickshaws would be breaking up as the band struck up the National Anthem. A bell tinkled from the bridge, the engines began to throb rhythmically, and the whole ship quivered. They were off ! A lump rose in the boy's throat, and the tears welled to his eyes. Throb, throb, went the engines, and the water began to lap against the sides of the vessel. They were off, off to Achin, and there, only a few hundred yards away, lay the island which held his friends, his safety, his father. A sudden rush, a quick dive, and he would be free. The " Flying Dutchman " dare not launch a boat in pursuit, and, to a powerful swimmer, the distance was nothing. He rose convulsively, but his arms dropped limply to his sides. He had given his word ; he was helpless. The maddening thought beat in his brain, and he clenched his hands. He was bound in hon-

our, and his honour was all that was left to him. As an Englishman he would keep it unsullied to the end, but at least he might take a last glimpse of the land where all his hopes were centred. Slowly he mounted the companion-ladder and reached the deck. The ship had gathered way, and was almost clear of the harbour, full speed ahead. The lights on shore were already growing blurred and confused. As he watched, they faded away to a faint, pale reflection in the distant sky.

No one on deck paid any heed to him as he stood at the rail gazing at the scattered lights along the shore as they shone out when the *Lankat* came abreast, and then dipped to obscurity as they dropped behind. Now they were passing the lighthouse at the end of the island. In a few minutes Penang would be left behind. A step sounded on the deck, and he turned, to find the Dutchman at his elbow.

" You get no help from your old school-fellow," he remarked quizzingly, lighting his pipe. " Bah ! never trust the half-caste. See you, if he had the money already then he help you and betray me.. But I keep the money, and it is safe for you to say good-bye alone with him."

The ship gave a roll as the man at the helm, in obedience to an order, changed the course.

"Ach, now we are free of the land," exclaimed the gun-runner, drawing a deep breath of satisfaction. "Westward ho! is it not? See! we have passed the lighthouse. If this were a new boat we could talk to Penang right across to Achin, for near the lamp is a Marconi station."

Wireless telegraphy! Percy's heart gave a sudden leap. He remembered that his father had used the apparatus to send a message to Singapore, and his hopes revived at the idea that until they arrived on the other side they were within the reach of Britain's mighty power. His companion went below, and he felt free to indulge his fancies undisturbed. Wireless telegraphy! Somewhere out on that dark expanse of water ahead Hollands's ship was cruising with orders to trap the "Flying Dutchman." The very thought sent the blood coursing through his veins with renewed vigour as he clutched the rail and stared at the revolving light. He must contrive to conceal his excitement from his captor. Too well he remembered the reputation of the man into whose clutches he had fallen, and bitterly he

realized how valuable a hostage he must appear in his eyes.

A bell rang, and one of the half-caste stewards approached and intimated that Percy was expected to dinner in the saloon. Composing himself for the ordeal, he went below and joined the Dutchman, who was already seated at the table with the captain. The latter, an old Swede, was a surly individual, with a great capacity for liquor, who took little notice of his companions, and early retired to his station on the bridge. The "Flying Dutchman," however, was in the best of humours, and after rallying Percy on his silence, gave some remarkably frank information about himself and his doings.

" You remember, on the *Caledonia*, I told you we would meet again," he said, sipping his coffee with evident relish. " Since then your movements haf been reported to me. Of course you know that Atjeh and your Chinese boy were spies. De Souza, he manage that with great cleverness. He was enraged about that letter he say you steal, and when I fail on the ship to get it back he try another way."

Finding that his companion expected no

rejoinder, Percy was content to listen, glad enough to have his thoughts distracted.

"Yes, I tell you," repeated the gun-runner meditatively, "and now you go to Achin. So ! I was myself very near capture in Ceylon. A dangerous business it was, but not without success. You—ah, no—England may haf cause to remember that visit of the ' Flying Dutchman ' in the years to come."

He shot an amused, significant glance at the lad, and bit the end off a cigar. Percy winced at his words, understanding that in "the years to come" he no longer counted, and, therefore, was a safe confidant. But what had this mischief-maker been doing in Ceylon ? Would he betray himself further ? His companion's next words dispelled the idea.

"From Ceylon," he continued, lighting his cigar, "I come to Penang. The ship I will not tell, even to you ; the captain he is mine friend, and I travel as an engineer. Never since the days of the Soudan haf I done that."

"The Soudan !" ejaculated Percy involuntarily.

"Yes, but certainly, the Soudan. I make much money at that time, did you not hear ? "

At another time his evident pride in his notoriety would have been amusing.

“ Captain Macpherson mentioned something about it ; but—but—”

“ Yes ? The old captain at Suez. I remember him. Why do you stare ? ”

“ We spoke about you when we were waiting for the *Caledonia* at Suez, and he mentioned the—the ‘ Flying Dutchman ; ’ but he said you—that is Richellmann—could not be the man because of the bushy eyebrows.”

The Dutchman leant back and burst into a roar of laughter.

“ Oh, the good André ! ” he exclaimed, chuckling ; “ many a time I bless the good André of the Rue du Temple in Paris for these bushy eyebrows he give me. See ! they stick fast, do they not ? ”

He pulled hard at them as he spoke to demonstrate the truth of his words, and even now Percy could hardly believe that they were false.

The Dutchman paused to puff at his cigar before continuing.

“ Ach, well, I come to Penang, and the first night you see me and follow. But you—you also and your friend of the police are followed, and that night you are very near to death.

If the Resident's son disappear, the row—that is what you call it?—would be too big, and I am caught. So you escape, but I trick you."

He chuckled again at the remembrance.

" We walk to the jetty, and the others go off in a boat, but I—I stay quiet, and wait till you are gone, and then go back. Ach, but it is droll. I trick you and De Souza also. You want me, and he want my money. If he gets that he cares not if I am caught, so——"

He checked himself to emphasize the point with a grimy finger.

" So I hide my money," he went on again—" the money which will be his when the rifles are handed to me. You see how anxious the half-caste is to get my money, while I on my part refuse to pay until the rifles are mine. De Souza likes not the thought of this meeting, but the skellum, cunning as he is, does not understand the reason. Once before he tries to rob me, and I 'take no chance,' as you say. So one night all by myself I hide my money in a little bag. Where do you think, hey?"

" In De Souza's own house!"

In spite of his position Percy was intensely

interested in these revelations, and began to understand the strained relations between the chief conspirators.

"The half-caste's house ! Himmel ! that is good, but I think not of it. No, I hid my monies in the old castle. There is an old little door, you know it ? I haf keys which open any door, even this, which has not been open for many years. The castle, it is never entered, and my monies will be safe there. Inside the door a stone in the wall is loose, and behind it I hide my little bag. You see now why I meet De Souza there to-morrow night, hey ? "

"Rather ! "

The lad's eyes sparkled with excitement, and his imagination ran riot. What a secret ! The "Flying Dutchman's" money lying hidden in the old castle, the exact spot detailed. Why—

"I tell you," concluded the Dutchman, rising to his feet, "because the joke is good ; and you—to-morrow night you will be in Achin. Come, a breath of air on deck before sleeping."

He smiled on his captive, a grim, cruel smile, and then, flinging the stump of his cigar through the port-hole, led the way to

the companion-ladder, humming gaily a snatch of the *Marseillaise*.

Mechanically the lad followed him, his airy castles shattered at a blow. Gone were the budding hopes of an hour ago—gone, too, the sudden elation at the Dutchman's disclosures. Who was he to outwit the notorious brigand who had defied the international forces of half the civilized world? Was it likely that such a man would betray himself as he had done that night, unless every precaution had been taken to ensure the silence of his confidant? The lad gazed around wildly, aghast at his rapidly approaching fate. Richellmann had joined the captain on the bridge, and he found himself the sole occupant of the deck. The night was intensely dark, save for the frequent flashes of summer lightning which flickered weirdly on the watery expanse of sea. Somewhere ahead, but still beyond the horizon, loomed the spectre of Achin, that grim, mysterious land. The poor lad shivered at the thought, and chill fear gripped his heart. The sight of the Dutchman maddened him, and he turned to hide his grief in his cabin. At the top of the companion-ladder he halted to take a last look around. Suddenly, away far

astern, like the flicker of a candle, a tiny light flashed out, quivered a second, and was gone. A light ! Could it possibly be that they were followed ? Was another ship already on their track ? Percy strained his eyes and waited eagerly. There it was again. A lighthouse—the Penang lighthouse ! Fifty miles away it sent forth its tiny stream of comfort, and with it came the forlorn remembrance of the wireless installation close by. Hope rose once more. Again he watched the distant light flash and wane, then with a stifled sob he waved his hand in a farewell salute and sought his cabin. Worn out with fatigue and the stress of the day's adventures, he flung himself down disconsolately on his bunk, and speedily forgot his sorrows in a deep sleep.

The sudden stoppage of the rhythmical engine beat roused the lad at last from a confused dream of monstrous sladang and dare-devil pirates, and he opened his eyes to find that the first glancing rays of the rising sun were lighting up his dingy cabin. For some time he lay quiet, recalling the events of the past twenty-four hours, and listening to the scurry of feet overhead. The noise and bustle increased, and the sudden scream of a siren

near at hand warned him that another vessel was approaching. Standing on his bunk, he peered through the port-hole, and perceived that they were within stone's throw of a large ocean tramp. In some excitement he watched the movements of the two ships, and soon realized, from the friendly hails from the respective bridges, that the meeting was not unexpected. The rifles ! Of course, that was the meaning of this assignation far from prying eyes. The " Flying Dutchman " had again outwitted the authorities. The tramp was now close by, and as she swung round to come alongside, her name, "*Sea Nymph*, Liverpool," showed up clearly on her stern. Fenders were flung out on both vessels, and a few minutes later the *Lankat* quivered as the stranger grated against her side. The rattling of chains, followed by a heavy bump, showed that no time was being lost, and, abandoning his post, Percy proceeded to perform a hasty toilet preparatory to going on deck. Quick as he was, he found on his appearance that the task was almost completed, only three great cases remaining on the deck of the tramp. These were speedily hoisted on to the *Lankat*, and the business was accomplished.

The “ Flying Dutchman,” who had been superintending operations, retired with the captain to his cabin, and the clinking of glasses indicated that the occasion was being suitably celebrated. In a few minutes he reappeared, and, catching sight of Percy, beckoned him to approach.

“ I haf won the game—as usual,” he exclaimed exultingly, indicating the cases with a sweep of his arm ; “ and now I go to Penang. Haf you any message for the Resident or your friend Brinscombe ? ”

Silently the lad shook his head, gazing defiantly into the face of his victorious and merciless tormentor.

“ So ? That is well. I do not wish to meet them, and there is no time for letters. See ! ” he added, pointing to a hazy blue outline on the horizon, “ your new home is in sight. *Pray that I am not caught.* You understand ? Now I go. Adieu.”

With a parting wave of the hand he sprang up the gangway, which was then withdrawn, and the two vessels drew apart. Gradually the space of water between them widened, the *Sea Nymph* described a clumsy circle and headed east, while the *Lankat*, with engines once more

at full speed, forged ahead towards the ominous coast of Achin.

Very shortly the steward informed Percy that breakfast was laid in the saloon, and partly to keep up appearances the lad obeyed the summons. He found the surly old captain snatching a hasty meal, and bade him "Good-morning." The only reply was an unintelligible grunt, and the Swede soon withdrew, munching a great hunk of bread. Percy had little appetite, nor was it increased by the sight of the victuals, which were of inferior quality, and dirtily served. He managed to swallow a cup of greasy, tepid coffee, and a piece of native bread carefully carved out of the grimy loaf, but then the stuffy atmosphere became overpowering, and he retreated on deck.

By this time the *Sea Nymph* was but a mere speck on the horizon, while the coast line was appreciably nearer. In an hour, or at most an hour and a half, they would reach the land, and then— He gripped the rail and gazed around, recoiling from his untimely fate. The smooth sparkling waters seemed to mock his misery and proclaim his isolation. His eyes grew moist and his sight dim, but of a sudden he started and drew himself up eagerly. Was

it a delusion, or— He rubbed his eyes and took another look. No ! he was not mistaken. Far away to the south a tiny trail of smoke hung on the still air, betraying the presence of another steamer. Was it—could it be—a rescuer ? A few short minutes would tell. He glanced round the deck furtively, anxious to note whether others besides himself had spotted the new-comer. The captain leant over the bridge gazing idly ahead, while the native beside him, his hands on the wheel, had eyes for nothing but the ship's course. Between decks several of the nondescript crew, under the directions of a half-caste mate, were sorting the cargo ; but as yet there was no sign of alarm or uneasiness. Again Percy concentrated his gaze on the south, and now there could be no doubt that the stranger was approaching. A funnel appeared out of nothingness and then the hulk of a ship—a big ship. The lad's excitement was intense, and he began to pace the deck in his anxiety. A glance at the land, and he started with dismay to notice how close it appeared ; another look at the stranger, and his hopes rose. She was coming up fast, but could she overtake them ? And now his fears were realized as the mate,

looking round, suddenly discovered the presence of the vessel and rushed, shouting, to the bridge. A few hurried words, gesticulations to the south, and the captain levelled his glass at the stranger. A moment he gazed, and then the bell to the engine-room tinkled peremptorily. The new vessel was regarded as an enemy, that was evident; but were not all vessels to be avoided by the *Lankat*, laden with contraband? What had the captain's glass revealed? Percy would have given his ears to know, but he stood alone amidst this outlaw crew and could expect no information or sympathy. There were shouts and cursings as the crew flung themselves on the incriminating cases. The ship quivered under the extra pressure of the engines, clouds of smoke belched from the funnel, and the churned water hissed past at an ever-increasing rate. The stranger, too, was alive to the situation, a white line of foam spurting from her bow as she came on at top speed. Now she changed her course a trifle, and even to Percy's inexperienced eyes she revealed herself a man-of-war. A moment later and the lad's hand rose to his throat in a mingled spasm of pride and relief as the

glorious old Union Jack burst out at her foretop.

Saved ! Could he doubt it ? A quivering cheer escaped his lips, and he waved his handkerchief, unmindful of the situation. Next second he rued the indiscretion. Growling out an imprecation, the captain flung himself off the bridge and advanced upon him, his face swollen with passion.

“ Below ! ” he bellowed, indicating the companion-ladder.

Percy hesitated. His parole had been given to De Souza and the “ Flying Dutchman.” Now that these two had gone he felt absolved from his promise, and a chance of escape might present itself at any moment. Below he might not be ready to seize it, or possibly the rescue party, if successful, might overlook his presence. These thoughts flashed through his mind as he faced the Swede, but his opponent held a trump card—and played it. His hand sought his pocket, and next instant Percy found himself covered by a revolver.

“ Go ! ” shouted the infuriated captain, “ queek ! ”

Realizing his helplessness, the lad obeyed, glancing round for the last time to estimate

his chances. Followed by his relentless persecutor he entered his stuffy cabin, the door of which was immediately locked on the outside. Here he was necessarily cut off from all sight of the British ship, as the port-hole faced the north ; and, bursting with impatience, he had perforce to await the course of events. For what seemed ages he listened to the bustle overhead and the hiss of the churning water as the *Lankat* sped him to his fate. Had his rescuers failed ? Were they already in shallow water where the war ship could not follow ? He leapt on to his bunk and peered out of the port-hole. Horrors ! the land was close at hand ! Already he could distinguish trees and a white line of surf.

Boom !

The roar of a big gun rent the close air with shattering effect, and a mighty cloud of spray shot up from the calm sea a short distance ahead. Would the gun-runners heed the warning ? Shouts of fear told him that some at least had lost heart, but the steady beat of the engines continued, and he recalled with dismay the stubborn, set face of the old skipper.

Bang ! Whir-r-r ! ”

A huge projectile hurtled over the ship,

so close that involuntarily the lad ducked ; but still the engines throbbed desperately.

Crash !

The *Lankat* shivered from stem to stern, heeling over at the tremendous impact. Cries, yells of fear arose, along with a suffocating sense of dust and smoke. The engines slowed, raced for a moment, and then were silent. The vessel glided ahead, lost way, and stopped. They had surrendered !

Mad with joy, Percy was about to dash himself against the door, when the voice of the captain reached his ears and he realized the prudence of restraint. The Swede was apparently answering a hail, and now indistinctly the lad caught the splash of oars. A boat bumped against the side of the ship, and the tread of feet sounded overhead. Voices were raised and the noise of splintering wood could be distinguished. There was a pause, followed by a quick, peremptory order, and then a sudden cry of warning. A revolver cracked, there was the sound of a scuffle, and flying steps sounded in the passage.

“ Help ! help ! ” yelled Percy, beating madly at the door, unable to restrain himself longer.

A key grated in the lock, laboured breathing indicated a struggle, and a well-known voice exclaimed, "Drop that, you old ruffian!"

The words were followed by the dull sound of a blow and the fall of a heavy body. The door was flung open, and next instant Percy was wringing the hand of his old friend and astonished deliverer, Hollands.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### THE MEETING AT THE FORT.

“ALDEN! Percy! What on earth are you doing here?”

The midshipman responded heartily to Percy’s welcome, but turned aside for a moment to give an order to two bluejackets who were unceremoniously leading off the captain of the *Lankat*.

“Great heavens! to think it was your life that murdering old rascal was wanting just now,” resumed Hollands, when they were alone. “He had a shot at the lieutenant, and then bolted down here, and when I came up with him he was about to let fly through the door of your cabin.”

He squeezed Percy’s arm affectionately and drew him towards the companion-ladder.

“Must go and report, old chap; come along. But tell me why it is you are not in Penang?”

“You should really ask our old friend

Richellmann. I only wish you had turned up half an hour sooner and nabbed him."

" Richellmann ! Is he in it ? Where is he ? "

" Why, don't you know ? Oh, of course not. Man ! Richellmann is the ' Flying Dutchman ' himself, and you've just missed him ! "

" What ? "

By this time they had reached the deck, and at Hollands's excited exclamation a lieutenant in British uniform, who had been issuing orders, turned round sharply and advanced towards them.

" Sir," said the middy, saluting, " this is Percy Alden, son of the Resident of Penang, an old chum of mine. He says we have just missed the ' Flying Dutchman.' "

" That so ? Where is he now ? "

" On the *Sea Nymph*, Liverpool, just out of sight, heading for Penang."

" Then we have him at last," replied the lieutenant shortly ; " but you must go on board the *Doris* and report to the captain at once. Have you any traps you wish to take ? "

" Just a bag," answered Percy, smiling

happily. "I'm only too glad to get off with a whole skin ! But for you I should now be in the hands of the Achinese."

"The Achinese !" exclaimed the two officers incredulously ; the middy adding, "I bet that's old Richellmann's dodge, the beast."

"Your story must be worth hearing," continued the lieutenant briskly, "but the *Doris* is waiting. I'll send a man for your things. Excuse my courtesy in hurrying you off immediately, but we must not let that scoundrel Van der Kehding get away. Have the boat manned, Mr. Hollands."

"May I go with him, sir ?" pleaded the middy.

"Well, yes, under the circumstances, I think you may, and send Mr. Landles to take your place. I must get this old cockleshell ship-shape and make for Belawen. She sails under the Dutch flag, so I must hand her and her precious crew over to the authorities there. Good-bye, Mr. Alden."

"Good-bye, sir," replied Percy, grasping his hand ; "thanks so much for getting me out of this scrape. I hope I'll see you in Penang soon."

"I hope so. I'm glad we saved you from

the Achinese, and missed you with our own little visiting card."

With a grim smile he indicated the havoc which the last shot had wrought in the *Lankat*.

The smoke stack was gone, half the bridge had been carried away, and several limp, dusky forms stretched on the littered after-deck proclaimed the fact that the victory had not been bloodless. With thankful heart Percy left the ill-omened ship and took his seat in the boat. The lusty tars gave way with a will, and in a few minutes he found himself on board His Majesty's second-class cruiser *Doris*. Almost immediately he was ushered into the presence of the captain, and gave a brief account of his experiences of the last twenty-four hours. The great man listened intently, issued some short, sharp orders, and then turned again to his unexpected guest.

" You have had a narrow escape," he said kindly, " but your troubles are over now. Thanks to your information we should soon lay this troublesome Dutchman by the heels. We shall communicate with the Resident, and in a short time we should hear from him."

" By wireless telegraphy ? "

" Yes, by Marconigram. And now," he

continued, rising to indicate that the interview was over, "I shall hand you over to your friend Mr. Hollands, who will, no doubt, be delighted to make you at home."

Hollands was. He stuffed his chum full of good food and procured a much-needed bath and change of clothes, while the other officers could not do enough to show their sympathy. Percy's adventures had to be told over and over again to eager audiences, and at last he began to feel quite a hero.

The warship was headed for Penang, and at half speed followed leisurely in the track of the *Sea Nymph*.

About noon word was brought that Percy was wanted on the bridge, and the lad hurried forward to obey the summons.

"Ah, Mr. Alden," exclaimed the captain as he appeared, "we have been in communication with Penang, and as it appears that your abduction was unknown, I decided not to upset your father with news which, happily, is already out of date."

"Thank you, sir; I am sure that is best."

"I think so. The Resident is quite well again, but is delaying his return from the Hill so as to lull any suspicions on the part of the

gun-runners. When it is dark we shall run close in to the Island and send the launch with some men to assist in the capture of these rascals. As none of my officers know the lie of this old fort, it occurred to me that you—as a non-combatant, of course—might go with them, but——”

“ Rather ! Thank you, sir ; and—and may Hollands come too ? ”

“ Mr. Hollands ? Well,”—the captain’s eyes twinkled—“ if you promise not to get into mischief, he may accompany you.”

Full of importance, Percy hurried off to acquaint his friend with the good news, which was greeted with a wild whoop of delight.

“ Good old ‘ Shellback ’ ! ” shouted the middy, apostrophizing the captain. “ How mad Richellmann will be when he spots us with the rest ! ”

“ Yes, he will be wild,” agreed Percy, grinning, “ especially as he prophesied the meeting when he left the *Caledonia* at Colombo. Do you remember saying how you wished you could meet him in a ‘ professional ’ way ? ”

“ By Jove, yes ! and now we’re going to lay him by the heels.”

“ I hope Cecil Brinscombe will be there too,” remarked Percy. “ He always distrusted



A light from the bluejacket's lantern revealed the  
swarthy features of the gun-runner.



De Souza, and when he hears how the beggar behaved on the *Lankat* he'll feel like pitching into him."

Constant communication by wireless was kept up with Penang, and just after the island was sighted a message arrived intimating that the *Sea Nymph* was passing the lighthouse and making for the harbour.

Darkness fell soon afterwards, and under its cover the *Doris* ran close in under the western or sea side of Penang, and hove to in such a position that she could guard both exits from the harbour if occasion required. Percy was questioned as to the exact position of the old fort, and it was decided that the launch would steal in by the northern entrance and land opposite the esplanade. Six of the bluejackets under a quartermaster were to remain in the launch and frustrate any attempt at rescue, while the rest, including Percy and the officers, were to scale the walls and enter the ruins. The police had arranged to hide outside and close in when the Dutchman and his companions approached the fort.

So excited were the lads that they were unable to do full justice to their dinner, and the ship's surgeon announced with solemn

gravity that he was half inclined to report their serious condition to the captain and order them to their bunks. At last, however, the welcome signal was given, and Percy found himself on board the launch with Hollands and Lieutenant Wenley, who was in charge of the expedition. The order was given "Full speed ahead!" and with lights concealed they made to round the northern extremity of Penang. Luckily, the sea continued smooth, and an hour later they were well to the east of the island, and already the lights of the town were visible. At Percy's suggestion they stood over to the coast of the Malay Peninsula, and then, under cover of an old hulk which was used for storing tobacco, the launch headed across and landed just opposite the fort. The six men detailed were on shore in a twinkling, Percy and the officers following, while the launch backed out and lay alongside under the shadow of the hulk.

Cautiously the little band crept up to the esplanade and, edging along to the darkest patch, paused to take their bearings. Not a soul was in sight, and a couple of men were sent over to reconnoitre and select the most suitable point for scaling the wall. In a few

minutes a dark lantern flashed twice in rapid succession, and Lieutenant Wenley was about to give the order to advance, when the figure of a native appeared suddenly from the deserted cricket ground and stole stealthily towards them along the esplanade. Casting furtive glances over the sea wall, the intruder advanced rapidly, and it seemed inevitable that their position should be discovered. Already the lieutenant had signed that the fellow must be captured, and the men were bracing themselves for the leap, when Percy suddenly raised himself and whispered, "Abdul!" Instantly the native policeman raised his hand to the salute, and then with a warning gesture glided away and melted into the darkness of the Maidan.

"Policeman!" explained the lad in response to Wenley's look of inquiry—"one of Brinscombe's men on the look-out for us."

The lieutenant nodded, and next moment the little band were over the esplanade and clambering up the deep moat on the other side. A friendly tar gave Percy a leg up, and assisted him in the dark to find his way over the uneven ground to the spot which the advance guard had chosen. No time was lost

in getting to work. Like parts of a puzzle the bluejackets formed themselves into a human ladder, two men at the base. The fifth man got astride the top of the old wall, and was joined by the sixth, who produced a coil of rope and immediately lowered his companion to the ground. Hollands followed, and then came Percy's turn. He managed better than he had expected, and felt quite proud of the whispered "Well done, sir!" from the fellow at the top. The sailors soon scrambled over by means of the rope, and as the last man dropped to earth a clock in the town proclaimed one o'clock.

"Now, Alden," said the lieutenant in a brisk undertone, "take us to the door you spoke about, quick. Time is pressing."

Percy, naturally, had only seen the door by day, and from the outside; but luckily he possessed the bump of locality, and by dint of much groping and cautious clambering over heaps of stones, he gained the place at last. The outer wall here was of immense thickness, and a narrow passage ran through it to the wicket mentioned by the Dutchman. Wenley posted his men round the inner entrance to this passage, while he, Percy, and Hollands took

up a position just at the mouth. Strict silence was enjoined, and a period of trying suspense ensued.

The usual hum from the busy town had died down, and only an occasional sound broke the stillness. A cool breeze was blowing gently, making the air raw and chilly. The sea lapped ceaselessly on the pebbly beach, and voices were wafted indistinctly from the various vessels in harbour. A bat, disturbed from its niche in the wall, circled noiselessly overhead, flitting back and fro with tireless persistence. Twice footsteps echoed on the road outside, causing a momentary thrill of expectancy ; but they passed on, and died away in the distance. Something seemed to stir in the mud of the moat close by, and Percy, who had been softly kicking a foot which had fallen asleep, paused to listen. As he did so, there came to his ears the distant echo of muffled oars, and instinctively he felt that his companions also had caught the sound. Now it seemed to fade away ; again it came, nearer and clearer, and at the same time stealthy footsteps were audible approaching from the town. The crisis was approaching, and at the thought a momentary feeling of pity for his old school-

fellow swept over Percy. Old associations rushed to his memory, with the recollection of happy days at Felton College. The sound of a boat bumping on the shore roused the lad from his reflections and set him quivering with excitement. Some one gave an order in a low, guttural tone, and steps sounded on the shingle. Whispered greetings were exchanged, and a low, confident chuckle showed that the Dutchman, at least, had no suspicions. His heavy tread sounded on the grass, there was a jangle of keys, and the lock grated. The little gate shook, the stars became visible in the sky beyond, and then there was a pause.

“ I will myself alone enter. Stay you there. I trust you not.”

Only too well Percy recognized the voice, and the answering tones of sulky protest. Some one crossed the threshold and groped his way cautiously along the wall. Click ! and a sudden stream of light from the bluejacket’s lantern illuminated the narrow passage, revealing the swarthy features of the notorious gun-runner. With a shout Wenley sprang forward, followed by his men, and in a moment the silence of the night was rent with cries and imprecations. A revolver cracked, and

some one fell with a deep groan. Locked in a furious struggle, the knot of men staggered to and fro, wrestling and fighting. Percy became tightly jammed in the confused throng swaying backwards and forwards in the confined space. Once he found himself thrust right up against his enemy, and by the furious look on the Dutchman's face, and the startled imprecation, he knew that he was recognized. Then the tide of battle flung them apart, and the desperate struggle was continued. Twice the Dutchman threw off his assailants, wrenching himself free, but each time the undaunted sailors recovered their grip, and at last he was tripped, thrown down, and secured. Panting and confused, Percy drew off, and gradually became aware of a group outside the fort gathered round a form lying motionless in the roadway. By the light of the lantern he recognized Brinscombe, who was just rising from his knees, and stepping forward, he clasped his friend's hand.

" You here, Percy ! Have you got the Dutchman ? "

" Yes, the *Doris* men have got him ; but who—who is that ? "

" De Souza, poor fellow—dead. That black-

guard, suspecting treachery, shot him through the heart at the first alarm."

Cecil's voice shook, and Percy, gazing awestricken on his fallen schoolfellow, experienced a sudden revulsion of feeling. He shivered, and drew back involuntarily, while Cecil explained the situation to the lieutenant. Brinscombe and his men, lying concealed in the moat, had darted forward at the first indication of a struggle, but too late to save the half-caste's life. The boat, which had instantly put off, was being pursued by a couple of police boats and the launch from the *Doris*. On the shore opposite Captain Nicholson was understood to be stationed with his Guides, cutting off all chance of escape in that quarter.

"The *Sea Nymph* may cut her cable and get clear," concluded Cecil; "but we are bound to bag the rest."

"She won't get far with the *Doris* on her track," commented the lieutenant. "Don't you worry about her. But what about the money?"

At his query they returned to the spot where the "Flying Dutchman" lay, gagged and guarded by the sailors. A brief scrutiny revealed the loose stone indicated by Percy, and

in a twinkling it was prized out, and a small leather bag exposed.

"Hullo! what are these? Bank of England notes!" exclaimed Wenley, counting them hurriedly. "Five thousand pounds, at least. By Jove! it must pay to gun-run. Here, Brinscombe. As representative of the law you had better take charge of this."

Cecil carefully stowed away the bag, and then announced that he must be off to make his report to his chief.

"Colonel Fell was to arrest old De Souza in his house at 1.30," he stated, "the hour you fellows informed us had been fixed by the Dutchman. By the way, how on earth did you find out his secret? We were unable to do so, although we were confident of success."

"Why, Alden here told us, of course," exclaimed Hollands.

"Percy! How on earth could he tell you, when he was in the Malay States shooting sladang?"

Laughing at his look of blank astonishment, Wenley explained briefly.

"Your friend was kidnapped by the *Lankat*, and the *Doris* rescued him just in time. It's a

long story, and no doubt he'll give you details ; but now, if you've no further use for our men, we must be off. I see the launch signalling."

Brinscombe, assuring him that he had an ample force to guard the prisoner, thanked him warmly for his assistance, and the little band of navy men re-embarked, taking a cordial farewell of Percy.

Several gharries fetched by a native policeman had by this time arrived on the scene, and De Souza's body was reverently placed in one of these, which drove off immediately to the mortuary. While the Dutchman was being transferred to another, Brinscombe questioned Percy eagerly as to his adventures, and expressed his boundless horror and indignation at his chum's desperate plight.

"The brutes!" he exclaimed vehemently. "Hanging's too good for that Dutch scoundrel ; and as for De Souza—well, he's dead. There's a spare gharry here. You'd better take it and drive to the Residency. Mr. Alden was to come back to-night."

"Thanks, I will. I've seen enough of the ' Flying Dutchman ' to last a lifetime ! Come up to-morrow if you can, and have a chat."

With another hearty hand-clasp the two friends

separated, and Percy was soon hastening home-wards. On his arrival he found the Resident eagerly waiting for news of the arrest, and his astonishment and relief at his son's tale may well be imagined. Confident in their ability to extract the required information from Swee Hin, who had been captured shortly after Percy left, the police had discovered too late that the Chinese boy was not "in the know," and it was only when the wireless message from the *Doris* arrived, that the gun-runners' plans were revealed.

The *Lankat* had again been searched an hour before sailing, and the Dutchman's subsequent presence on board was veiled in mystery. From first to last the Resident had no suspicion that Percy had left Captain Nicholson, and little he dreamt, when he heard of the *Lankat*'s departure, that his only son was a hostage on board.

Percy awoke next morning to find that his adventures were the talk of the town. Telegrams of congratulation to the Resident for the capture of the "Flying Dutchman" poured in from all quarters, including the Governor of Singapore and the authorities in Sumatra. Colonel Fell intimated that he would recom-

mend Brinscombe for the next vacant post, and altogether Percy and his friends gained great kudos over the affair.

The lad's proudest moment, however, came when Captain Nicholson presented him with the horns of the sladang he had faced and slain.

After consultation with his father and Cecil, he decided to send the trophy home to Doctor Porchester as a gift to the Felton College museum. In the accompanying letter he recorded poor De Souza's untimely end, and gave a graphic description of his adventures, and the final capture of the "Flying Dutchman."

THE END.





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